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MAJOR CASEWORK

J Farmer

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The Planning Inspectorate
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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: S62A/2022/0014 Land west of Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden

I would like to object to the above development which I list on the attached document.

Yours faithfully


J A Farmer

BUILDING ON AGRICULTURAL LAND

The *Published Geological, Soil and ALC Information* document categorizes the land as grade 2 and 3a. Grade 2 being 'very good quality agricultural land' ie 'Land with minor limitations which affect crop yield, cultivations or harvesting' and Grade 3a as Good quality agricultural land' ie 'Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, ...' [I believe wheat is usually grown there.] I believe it would be a mistake to waste such good quality agricultural land on a housing development.

An article in the *Guardian* by Helena Horton (*Huge rise in building on prime farmland in England stokes food security fears*) dated 20 July 2020 says that the 'CPRE finds developments have increased hundredfold since 2010 ... calling the country's food security into question. The article also quotes the CPRE as calling for a 'brownfield first approach to housebuilding'. Helena Horton goes on to say that 'The government recently admitted that the country needs to produce more of its own food.' A report by Matt McGrath also highlighted this in his article for the BBC titled 'UK faces 'significant' shortage of farmland by 2030' which says that 'Britain is running out of land for food and faces a potential shortfall of two million hectares . . .' according to a report by the University of Cambridge. The article also highlights an expected increase in population to over 70 million by 2030.

The effects of the war in Ukraine are also significant with regard to food security. According to *The effect of the war in Ukraine on UK farming and food production* (a report by Sarah Cole, Xameerah Malik, Felicia Rankl, Paul Bolton and Iona Stewart dated July 2022 and sourced from the House of Commons Library) Ukraine is 'sometimes referred to as the "breadbasket" of Europe' and 'grows enough food to feed an estimated 400 million people. The report goes on to say 'The conflict has prevented farmers in some areas of Ukraine from attending to their fields and has disrupted transport networks.' Also 'CNN reported on 11 July that "Ukrainian officials are in no doubt that part of Russia's strategy is to destroy Ukraine's agricultural wealth'. The war shows no signs of coming to an end and according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation 'the war in Ukraine has added to an already challenging situation and could lead to an increase [in the numbers of] chronically undernourished people this year . . . '. Now this might sound a little over dramatic when considering an application for just three fields but presumably applications of this kind are being submitted all over the UK and taken together would add up to a substantial area of land. With Ukraine unable to export much of its crops it is vital that the UK maximises its use of its agricultural land for the sake of food security and to minimise the need to import what can be grown here.

FLOOD RISK

Policy GEN3 (Flood Risk) says that 'inappropriate development in areas of high-risk flooding should be avoided.' The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact assessment) Regulations 2017 says 'We have no historic flood event information for this area.' However, when contacted a spokesperson for the Lord Butler Leisure Centre said that they had been flooded on three occasions, the most recent being on 26 July 2021. Building on land that currently has none can only increase the likelihood of flooding both on the site itself and further downstream.

FAUNA AND FLORA

The survey of bats has an anomaly. Point 3.33 says the land is 'unsuitable habitat for bats' and yet 3.34 states that they found evidence of 7 species being recorded on site!

The bird survey found that several species of rare and endangered species of bird were found including '12 records of species protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 8

records of Species of Principal Importance (SoPI), 53 records of species on the BoCC Red list and 27 records of species on the BoCC Amber list.' Many species nest in hedgerows, which also meet the criteria for priority habitat according to the above document.

Point 3.55 suggests that they could find somewhere else to live. However some species are territorial and could find that difficult. It is also likely that, owing to noise and the presence of human activity, potential nesting sites will be abandoned both while any building work is going on and afterwards when the homes are occupied.

It is also noted that the bird surveys only took place in the summer months and not spring when nests are being built. Nor did any take place when any birds are wintering here.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

Firstly I would like to point out that the photographs were all taken when trees etc were in full leaf. Views of the site during the six months when trees etc are bare are greatly enhanced as it is possible to see what is beyond them. The photographs were also taken at ground level and don't take into account views from the upper floors of neighbouring homes. The views are also selective and don't take into account the beneficial effect of walking along Thaxted Road.

The visual impact of the proposed development would have a detrimental effect on people's views for the following reasons:

The beneficial effects of the views and visual amenity of the site as it is currently are: a feeling of mental well-being, calmness of mind, lowering of blood pressure and a reduction in insomnia and anxiety. This would all be lost should any buildings be erected on the site.

The same applies to views from homes, particularly those that are the closest to the site.

I note that 4.34 ie 'In conclusion and having appraised the above factors it is judged that the site and the immediate landscape is overall of medium landscape value.' However for those of us who live here and experience the views all day, every day, the views from our homes and when walking in the area are extremely precious!

SCHOOL AND HEALTH CARE CAPACITY

Hundreds of new homes have been built in Saffron Walden in the past few years yet, as far as I am aware no new schools or GP surgeries have been built. There is mention in the policy guidance that this could be mitigated by a financial contribution by the Developer, but to what end? Additional funds can't create extra school places if school buildings don't have the capacity for more classrooms. The same applies to GP surgeries.

TRANSPORTATION

Audley End station is 2.8 miles from the site by road. Buses are few and far between. They usually run hourly and go into the town centre, not to the station, necessitating a journey of two buses (roughly 40 minutes) just to get to the station. The alternative being to drive which would add to air pollution and greater carbon emissions.

HOUSING MARKET

I realise that this might not normally be considered by the Planning Committee but I would like to point out that the tide has been turning when it comes to the property market with people no longer moving out of cities to the countryside and would like to cite the following articles as evidence:

Scott Fraser, Estate Agent (ScottFraser.co.uk) *Are people still moving out of cities . . . or are they moving back?*

‘Still, many of those who left cities for the countryside now regret their move.’ ‘Now that most workers are back in the office for at least part of the week, being closer to work has become a bigger priority than having extra space. Compared to the lockdown period of January 2021, they’ve seen a 50% increase in people looking to move from rural homes into some of Britain’s biggest cities, and a fall in the number of people heading to the countryside.’ The article goes on to say: ‘In early 2022, property expert Phil Spencer predicted that people would move back to cities this year, now that restaurants, clubs and theatres are back up and running, with London, Manchester and Liverpool likely to be popular with movers. And there is certainly data to back this up.’

Right Move, 18 May 2022 *How has the housing market changed in 2022*

Quoting their property expert Tim Bannister said ‘Many people started the year needing to prioritise being closer to work over having more space. This has contributed to a rise in enquiries from people in more rural areas to cities, and a drop in the number of people looking to escape to the country.’

Zoopla also had a similar article on its site. ‘The flight to rural and coastal areas looks to be shifting into reverse as buyers begin migrating towards towns, cities and urban areas. And ‘The shift from rural and coastal homes to urban homes is set to continue throughout 2023.

BBC article 11 January 2023 *Barratt warns of “marked slowdown” in housing market*

They cite ‘political and economic uncertainty and rising mortgage costs as the reason with the Bank of England saying that ‘mortgage approvals fell to their lowest level in two years as interest rates put off buyers’.