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Section 62A Applications Team
The Planning Inspectorate
3rd Floor
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Temple Quay
BRISTOL BS1 6PN

9th September 2024

Your ref: S62A/2024/0057

By email (section62a@planninginspectorate.gov.uk)

Dear Sir/Madam

Section 62A Planning Application S62A/2024/0057
Former Friends' School Field, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden, Essex
CB11 3EB

I am writing with comments for the consultation on the above planning application and trust that you will give serious consideration to these during its determination. I am responding in the capacity as a Chartered Building Surveyor who lives locally and knows the site in question well, having been a pupil at the school, later a governor for a period and most recently a member of a group who bid against Chase Homes to purchase the site for continuing educational use.

Significant Harm to the Conservation Area and Open Space Important to the Overall Character of the Town

Aerial photographs of Saffron Walden show clearly that the former Friends' School site represents one of two large open spaces in the town, the other being the Common. It is the open nature of the former school playing field that creates its character and appearance and led to its inclusion within the Conservation Area.

Policy ENV1 of Uttlesford's 2005 Local Plan protects Conservation Areas by permitting only development that preserves or enhances their character and appearance (including open areas). The proposals by Chase for the former school playing field in no way do either. Quite to the contrary, residential development of any scale on this site (let alone for no less than 91No dwellings) will destroy its fundamental essence and dilute the special character of the town overall.

An offer to purchase the site for continued educational use was outbid by Chase Homes who speculated that they could place a higher bid than was viable for a school if they ultimately obtained permission for housing. The demand for educational or sports uses has not disappeared, so the application contradicts Local Plan Policy LC1. Building on the former playing school playing field should be seen to be as unacceptable as building on the town's Common would be.

Unsustainable Development

The proposed housing would not constitute sustainable development as defined the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) so would be contrary to this. By no manner of means would the proposals by Chase Homes outweigh the major adverse effects they would have on the Conservation Area or considerable loss of sports facilities involved as well as the negative impact on nearby locally listed buildings (which include the former school main building). The applicant does not make a case that cites positive contributions that their development will make towards a sustainable future.

The applicant also plays down the degree of harm to the surrounding built environment, particularly locally listed buildings. Perhaps this is unsurprising given that Chase Homes's Heritage and Archaeology Statement has been prepared ACD Environmental who apparently specialise in landscape architecture and ecology and lack personnel with recognised training or accreditation in building conservation.

Conclusion

I have highlighted some key issues around harm to the Conservation Area and unsustainable development that would arise from this development but there are also multiple other objections that could be made against these proposals by Chase Homes.

I urge that this planning application be firmly rejected.

Yours faithfully

Douglas D Kent 



