

Representation made on behalf of households next to or close to the former Friends' School, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden CB11 3EB

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

Sent via e-mail: section62a@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

18th September 2024

Please accept this submission as a formal response to the above application.

We wish to formally oppose the planning application by Chase New Homes for the development at former Friends School Field, Mount Pleasant Lane, Saffron Walden (Application S62A/2024/0057).

This submission highlights concerns regarding the impact of the proposed development on the local community, the insufficient provision of sports facilities, and the overall lack of material changes from the previous planning refusal.

1. Previous Planning Refusal and Lack of Material Change

The current application mirrors much of what was previously refused under Application UTT/19/1744/OP in 2021. The core issues surrounding the loss of protected playing fields and the importance of this open space to the local community remain unresolved. The only notable difference is the increased emphasis on the demand for housing, with no meaningful change to address the concerns about the site's historic and recreational value.

The 2021 refusal clearly outlined that the playing field is a protected area, integral to the conservation character of Saffron Walden, as confirmed by the Saffron Walden Conservation Area Appraisal (2018) and the Saffron Walden Neighbourhood Plan (SWNP 2022). These documents highlight the area's contribution to the town's aesthetics and its importance as a green open space juxtaposed against the surrounding built form (SWNP 5.2.6; SW3).

There has been no substantial effort to address these planning concerns, especially regarding the area's conservation status.

2. Insufficient Sports Provision and Loss of Community Facilities

The application seeks to replace former sports fields with two small football pitches and a clubhouse, which falls short of previous community provisions. Historically, the site hosted a wide range of sports, including football, cricket, and other local athletic activities.

The loss of these fields has had a significant impact on local sports clubs and community groups, many of whom now have to travel further afield for suitable facilities. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 103) states that development on sports fields should only occur if the land is surplus to requirements or if equivalent or better provision is made. This has not been the case here, as evidenced by the 2024 Uttlesford

Playing Pitch Strategy, which identifies a shortage of cricket, rugby, and tennis facilities—none of which are addressed in this proposal.

The lack of a robust plan for managing, funding, and maintaining the proposed sports facilities is another concern. The application does not outline how the playing fields and clubhouse will be operated, nor does it indicate any long-term commitment to the site being accessible to the community. Without legally binding guarantees for the delivery and management of these facilities, there is a real risk that the developer could amend the proposal in the future to remove sports provisions entirely, as seen with the unfulfilled promise of the swimming pool.

3. Disingenuous Claims Regarding Non-Use of Sports Facilities

The applicant's suggestion that the sports facilities have not been in use since the school's closure implies a lack of demand, yet this is misleading. The reality is that the applicant has actively prevented any usage of the site, contrary to the claim that it is no longer required. For an accurate representation of the site's community value, the applicant should provide evidence of efforts to retain or encourage local sports and community use, which to date have been non-existent.

4. Impact on Conservation Area and Loss of Open Space

The Friends School Field is located within the Saffron Walden Conservation Area, where policy ULP ENV1 strictly protects open spaces of community and historic value. The proposed development would erode the area's character, which is contrary to local planning policies (SWNP 5.2.8; SW3). The Conservation Area Appraisal further underscores the importance of this space, stating that the playing fields form an essential green buffer against the denser urban surroundings (1.305).

As such, the application is in breach of ULP Policy ENV1, which mandates that development within conservation areas must preserve or enhance the character of the area. The introduction of 91 dwellings, even with the small provision of sports fields, does not meet this requirement and would significantly diminish the open space's visual and social contribution to Saffron Walden.

5. Traffic and Parking Concerns

The development will put further pressure on local roads, particularly Mount Pleasant Lane, which already struggles with congestion. The application proposes 46 unallocated visitor spaces shared between the residential area and the clubhouse. This is insufficient, especially when considering peak times for sports events, which would likely lead to parking spillover onto surrounding streets, exacerbating existing traffic issues (SWNP SW12).

The NPPF Chapter 9 stresses the importance of promoting sustainable transport options, yet the current plan lacks adequate provisions for pedestrians and cyclists. Without better connectivity to the wider town and improved cycle infrastructure, the proposal falls short of meeting the NPPF's guidelines on sustainable travel (NPPF 108).

6. Housing Mix Inadequacies

The proposed housing mix is unbalanced, with a lack of smaller, more affordable homes, particularly two-bedroom houses, which are in higher demand locally. The Saffron Walden Neighbourhood Plan (SWNP SW1) emphasises the need for housing developments to reflect local needs, including a range of property

sizes. The current proposal, which leans heavily toward three-bedroom homes, does not meet these local requirements and fails to provide a balanced housing mix.

7. Conclusion

In summary, the application by Chase New Homes fails to address the core issues that led to the previous planning refusal in 2021. There is insufficient provision for sports and community facilities, an absence of legal guarantees for their delivery, and the development would irreversibly harm the character of the Saffron Walden Conservation Area.

Furthermore, the proposal does not reflect local housing needs, nor does it provide adequate infrastructure for sustainable transport.

We urge the planning authority to reject this application on the grounds outlined above, which are supported by local and national planning policies, including the Saffron Walden Neighbourhood Plan, the Uttlesford Local Plan, and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Should a hearing be held, we request the opportunity to speak and provide further evidence of the community's opposition to this application.

Yours faithfully,

Calum Ewing

