

Takeley Parish Council – PINS Hearing on 6th February 2025

S62a/2023/0019 – Land to the north of Roseacres, Takeley

My name is Cllr Jim Backus, speaking on behalf of Takeley Parish Council.

The Parish Council strongly objects to the unsustainable location of this development, causing unacceptable heritage and landscape harm and significant harm to irreplaceable ancient woodland.

This development site was part of the wider proposal dismissed at appeal in August 2022. The emerging Local Plan has also rejected the principle of housing development on Bull Field, and instead this area will be designated as a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) in the new Local Plan.

A housing allocation of up to 1500 homes east of Takeley is reliant on retaining the countryside gap surrounding Priors Wood and the preserving the setting of the conservation area, therefore approval of this development could put future housing delivery at risk.

This development would urbanise a key area of the Countryside Protection Zone, covered by Policy S8, which was subject to a comprehensive review in the 2016 LUC Study, and it was assessed again by the Council's Landscape consultants HDA for the new Local Plan evidence base in 2024.

The LDA assessment is described as (quote) 'a report analysing the 2005 Countryside Protection Zone Policy, its status and suggested amendments to

strengthen how it complies with the NPPF to inform the Local Plan'. The evidence is therefore a material consideration for this application.

The Smiths Green Parcel, which includes Bull Field, is stated to be important to protect settlement identity, and to maintain the open characteristics of the Countryside Protection Zone.

The agrarian landscape is important to the setting of the **Conservation Area**, as set out in the designation appraisal, which we have referred to in our written evidence.

The access arrangements and layout of the development are such that it will be impossible to provide an effective 15m buffer to protect Priors Wood from harm and, at the same time, to comply with Highways' extensive foot and cycle route conditions 4 (a) to (e).

UDC's landscape and tree expert Mr Drummond stated in written evidence from the 2022 appeal that there would be harm to the ancient woodland from the proposed development.

In his proof of evidence, he stated in paragraph 8.3, (quote)

'the proposed hard surfaced access road (vehicle entranceway) sits wholly within the buffer zone. This intrusion into the buffer zone is exacerbated further should the 15-metre-deep buffer zone be considered from the woodland canopy... This will likely result in the greatest effect and therefore harm on the woodland. In addition, at this same place, it is proposed to create a feature entrance into the wood with a stone surface. Together, there

is likely to be, not only, harm to the woodland but also the protected species within it. I can see no mitigation measures which will prevent this harm...

The second element to consider is the harm the proposed development may have on tree roots’.

He reiterated those comments at the previous hearing for this application and questioned that several housing plots may also breach this buffer. Harm to the ancient woodland was also stated in the Woodland Trust’s written objection, where they advised that a wider buffer should be secured, and raised concerns that with an inadequate buffer, light-spill and domestic pets would be sources of harm to the woodland and its wildlife.

In planning conditions, we note that community mitigation contributions have not been secured. There is a 5-year option for a medical facility, which was approved as part of the Seven Acres development, but this has not materialised. Land for extending the primary school grounds does not benefit the wider community and no financial contributions have been secured to support the community hall or to improve sporting facilities in the village, as have been agreed for other developments in Takeley.

To the east of the site, the sustainable transport routes cannot be provided without additional permission from the Secretary of State for any surfaced paths to cross the registered village green verges along Smiths Green. Essex Highways notes in its November 2023 comments that (quote) ‘recognising that some of these measures have been secured as part of permissions for adjacent development sites’. We therefore request an amendment to the planning conditions so that all sustainable transport routes are constructed **prior to**

commencement of the development, rather than prior to occupation of the new homes.

In our view, the harms significantly outweigh the benefits of the proposal and we respectfully ask that this application is refused permission.