

S62A/2025/0077 - Land West of High Street, Stebbing

I object to this planning application for the following reasons.

1. Open Countryside

The application site is located outside of the development limits and Policy S7 of the ULP states that development will only be permitted if its appearance protects or enhances the particular character of that part of the countryside or there are special reasons why the development needs to be there.

Policy STEB9 of the Stebbing Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) also states that in order to protect the intrinsic character of the countryside, support will only be given to certain types of development, such as infill of small gaps in small groups of houses and with limited impact on the countryside. This application cannot be considered as infill development under the terms above.

The existing pattern of development along the south side of the High Street is that of linear properties ending with Laurel House before the road becomes the Downs and a significant gap in development ensues before reaching Downs Villas, semi-detached houses in linear form. This application would introduce a new element of built development which would occupy part of the open area behind the existing linear development line within both the High Street and the Downs. As a result, I believe that the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the spacious character of the area, failing to protect or enhance the character of the countryside, due to its siting and scale.

2. Conflict with the Stebbing SNP

The SNP was adopted in July 2022 and as such it became part of the development plan within the last five years. As such it needs to be given significant weight.

This application conflicts with the SNP in many areas. Approval of this application would ride roughshod over the whole consultation process which not only addressed viable sites for future development but the whole conservation of the heritage and distinctive character of the village.

2.1 Housing Allocations

The SNP sets out current committed sites providing an additional 52 dwellings and a further 6 sites to provide up to 20 more dwellings, totalling up to 72 additional dwellings.

- The application sites were specifically *excluded* from the sites for future development and
- As 72 additional dwellings exceeded the indicative future requirements from UDC at that time (25 dwellings between 2019 and 2033), then I can see no rationale for supporting this application.

Indeed, a Government Planning Inspector dealing with an appeal against UDC for refusing a planning application commented “as the Stebbing Neighbourhood Plan was made in the last 2 years and contains policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirements, the adverse impact of allowing development which would conflict with the neighbourhood plan is likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits” (APP/C1570/W/22/3312330 13 June 2023). The appeal was refused by the Inspector.

Furthermore, another Government Planning Inspector has recently rejected the argument that because the housing allocations are evolving, the SNP cannot be relied upon, stating that “they were based upon the evidence available at the time of preparation and the emerging Local Plan has only reached Regulation 19 stage” (APP/C1570/W/24/3346237).

2.2 Local Green Spaces

SNP Policy STEB4 sets out 7 designated green spaces which are demonstrably special to Stebbing Parish. The process of selection and designation has been reviewed against official criteria and verified by an Independent Examiner. In relation to the two green spaces which form the site for this application, the Examiner noting the following in February 2022:

- “The field opposite the primary school – valued for its historic importance (due to the location of the Mount which is a well-preserved medieval motte castle and scheduled monument), and part of the setting of the Conservation Area with its parkland character contributing to its significance”.
- “The field opposite the Downs – enjoyed for the views by walkers and other recreational users as well as its historic importance”.

The NPPF treats designated local green spaces as subject to the same strong development restrictions as Green Belt, with new development ruled out other than in special circumstances. There are no special circumstances. These green spaces are not all about public access as they need to be preserved to protect wildlife areas, the parkland setting of the Conservation Area and the historical importance of the landscape which cannot be fully appreciated in the future if these dwellings are built. The application is contrary to SNP Policy STEB2 Green Infrastructure and Development, as the proposals do not enhance the visual characteristics of the green space.

2.3. Important and Protected Views

SNP Policy STEB7 sets out the key important and protected views which includes items 5 and 6, views from the Downs towards Stebbing Park and views from the Downs to the Mount. This application will have a significantly adverse impact on those views because of the height and scale of the development.

The Mount is a significant historical asset and views will be adversely impacted by 3 mini-housing estates with large houses, lots of glass and with the highest housing density closest to the ancient Mount. The concentration of affordable housing undermines the NPPF policy to create mixed and inclusive communities.

2.4. Heritage Assessment

A core objective of the SNP is to conserve and enhance the heritage and distinctive historic character of the Parish, its village, surrounding settlements and each of their respective landscape settings. SNP Policy STEB1 will only support development proposals where they conserve or enhance and are sympathetic to the heritage asset and its setting as well as its wider context and location. The prospect of dwellings being located within the setting of the Mount will destroy forever the understanding of the original open landscape over which the motte castle exercised control. In the reasons for designation of the Mount as an ancient monument, Historic England note that “motte castles generally occupied strategic positions dominating their immediate locality and as a result are the most visually impressive monuments of early post-Conquest period surviving in the modern landscape”.

3. Site Access and Egress

This application envisages four additional entrances/exits onto the Downs. This section of the Downs is heavily congested with a continuous line of parked cars on one side of the road when children are attending and leaving the school. The additional entrances and vehicle movements as well as the location of the site car park opposite the school and residents’ houses for 20+ cars, will seriously increase the risk of harm to children and parents as they appear from behind parked cars.

The applicant has submitted a Road Safety Audit report (Appendix C of the Technical Note – Transport lodged 17 Feb 2025). The audit was carried out on 15th March 2024 between the hours of 12.00pm and 13.00pm and paragraph 1.4 states “vehicular traffic levels were considered to be low”. This is an ineffective report because it does not address the congestion which takes place on school days between 08.20am and 09.00am and 14.50pm and 15.30pm. At these times traffic on the Downs is restricted to one lane with vehicles on the wrong side of the road overtaking an extensive line of parked cars, causing queues which would block access and egress from sites B,C and D.

G Spilman

07/03/2025