

**RESPONSE TO
ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT COUNCIL
REFERENCE PLANNING APPLICATION
5/2021/3194**

St Stephens Green Farm, Chiswell Green

**Statement by
Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPI**

and

Keep Chiswell Green



KEEP CHISWELL GREEN

Introduction

1. Keep Chiswell Green (KCG) is a local volunteer-led campaign group, formed in response to the planning applications submitted for development of the Metropolitan Green Belt to the west of Chiswell Green, and the numerous proposals put forward for development of this land under the St Albans City and District Council's "Call For Sites" in preparation for the next Local Plan. KCG can confidently say it represents the overwhelming majority of residents of Chiswell Green, based on 98% of residents who have supported us through our door to door canvassing of in excess of 1,000 properties in the village at the time of writing.
2. This statement has been prepared by Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPI ("the consultant") and Keep Chiswell Green (KCG). It has been compiled in response to an invitation by the City and District of St Albans ("the Council") to make further comments on a planning application (LPA reference 5/2021/3194) by McPartland Planning Limited ("the applicant") for development at St Stephens Green Farm, Chiswell Green Lane, St Albans, on the site known locally as "the Polo Field". The description of the proposed development was as follows:

"Outline application (access sought) for demolition of existing buildings, and the building of up to 330 discounted affordable homes for key workers, including military personnel, the construction of new accesses."

3. The application ("the Polo Field application") was originally validated by the Council on 24th November 2021 and was due to have been determined by the Planning Referrals Committee on 28th March 2022. The case officer had prepared a report, which was published in advance, according to the Council's standing orders. In the report, the officer's recommendation was for the refusal of the application. However, prior to the meeting, it was announced that the application had been withdrawn from the agenda.
4. On 23rd March, the applicant's planning consultant, Brian Parker, wrote to all members of the Planning Referrals Council in an email which claimed that the officer's recommendation was incorrect and was based on two major misunderstandings. He claimed that if the report was not corrected, it would inevitably mislead the Committee and members of the public. The Committee did not consider the application at that stage, and the officer's report was withdrawn from the planning portal in early April 2022.
5. On 14th April the Council published on its website several items of further information from the applicant. One of these documents was an Opinion by Paul Stinchcombe QC, dated 11th February, which had been commissioned by the applicant. The Opinion was a critique of an internal consultation from the Council's Strategic Planning Team and the team's views on affordable housing and Green Belt policy. The original email from the planning consultant, which had drawn on Counsel's advice, was also posted on the website, together with a full rebuttal of the officer's report and its recommendation.

6. As can be seen from the relevant pages on the website, the application had previously generated over 360 public responses, most of which objected to the proposed development. When the “further information” was published on 14th April, there was a widespread reaction from the local community at the nature of the documents that had been tardily submitted and there was considerable outrage that the application team appeared to be attempting to “strong arm” the Council into recommending that the application be approved. KCG shared those concerns.
7. Since that point, the May local elections have returned a new Council, which is reviewing its constitution and the process by which it determines planning applications. In fairness, the Council has given the public and previous consultees an extended time period in which to comment, both on the applicant’s rebuttal documents and additional information which has come forward. This has included responses from consultees which had not been received prior to the Referrals Committee on 28th March.
8. KCG welcomes this opportunity. It is particularly important because, since the submission of this application, an application by Cala Homes for development on land south of Chiswell Green Lane was lodged with the Council (LPA reference 5/2022/0927). The proposed development, for up to 391 dwellings, has also attracted a considerable amount of public interest, to the extent that the capacity of the website for comments on a single application has been exceeded. KCG has also objected to that application - its statement can be found on the Council’s website.
9. In the opinion of KCG, it is imperative that the two applications - to the north and to the south of Chiswell Green Lane - be considered together at the same Committee. If both applications were to be granted, 722 dwellings would be added to the housing stock at Chiswell Green, increasing the size of the settlement by nearly 55%. The combined effects of that amount of development - on the Green Belt, the highways network, and the community - are set out below in this statement.
10. Although the Polo Field application was withdrawn from the agenda of the Planning Referrals Committee on 28th March last, the officer’s report was published and is a matter of public record. The recommendation for refusal of planning permission was widely welcomed in the local community, including by the many local residents who had sent in their objections. At the time, KCG agreed with the officer’s assessment of the application and the recommendations.
11. Three reasons for refusal were recommended as follows:
 - i) the impact on the Green Belt and the lack of very special circumstances required to allow the approval of inappropriate development
 - ii) the absence of an agreed S106 or other suitable mechanism required in order to secure a range of services and infrastructure provision
 - iii) the lack of access to public transport and cycling facilities, with a Travel Plan contrary to Part 9 of the NPPF 2021

12. KCG is disappointed that the applicant is still pursuing this application despite such strong opposition from the local community and a recommendation from the case officer in March against granting permission. Comments by KCG, which embrace the issues raised within the community, are set out in the remainder of this statement, which is structured as follows:

- Policy Context
- Green Belt
- Land as an essential natural asset
- Transport and Highways
 - The site entrance location is inappropriate
 - The increased traffic cannot be accommodated by the local area
 - The impact of other committed development must be considered
 - Proposals to reduce traffic volumes will be ineffective
 - Unrealistic assumptions regarding bicycle travel in the St Albans area
 - Reduced levels of travel by public transport for work and leisure
 - Few local amenities accessible on foot or by bicycle
 - Low rates of pedestrian travel
 - Flaws in proposals to shift behaviour towards bicycle travel
 - Developer infrastructure contributions
 - Summary of transport and highways response
- Comments on the Applicant's Further Information
- Health, Facilities and Services
- Summary and Conclusions

Policy Context

13. In their submissions, the applicant has argued that the development plan for the area is out-of-date and that very special circumstances do exist which outweigh the need to retain the Green Belt on the application site. Under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the determination of planning applications must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The current development plan for the area therefore consists of the adopted St Albans Local Plan Review 1994 and the adopted Hertfordshire Minerals and Waste Plans

14. Nevertheless, the applicants make the point that the District Plan is out-of-date and is therefore inconsistent with government policy as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). They emphasise paragraph 11 of the NPPF, which states as follows:

“Plans and decision should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.”

“For decision-taking, this means:

(c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay: or

(d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

- (i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
- (ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.”*

15. KCG rejects the interpretation of paragraph 11 by the applicant and the blanket “presumption in favour”. On the one hand, it is a fact that many of the policies in the St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994 are out-of-date. On the other hand there are a number of “saved” policies which were endorsed by the then Secretary of State in a Direction dated 14th September 2007. These are still highly relevant and are used by the local planning authority as a basis for decision-making. The most important of these is Policy 1 Metropolitan Green Belt.
16. The NPPF paragraph 11 (d) refers to the grant of permission **unless** the application of policies that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusal. Footnote 7 to the policy lists those areas and assets of importance, one of which is Green Belt. From this, it is clear that the Green Belt is the dominant factor in the determination of this application.
17. The applicant makes some reference to the draft St Albans Local Plan, which was withdrawn by the City and District Council in 2020. A new version is in preparation but is still in the early stages. In these circumstances, the basis for decision-making remains the 1994 Local Plan Review, and the NPPF.
18. At a public meeting hosted by Park Street Residents’ Association on 1st June 2022 at the Parish premises, Tennyson Hall, Daisy Cooper, MP for St Albans, explained that all the sites that had been put forward under the St Albans City and District Council’s “Call For Sites” in preparation for the next Local Plan are currently being assessed, and that all sites have to be evaluated equally at this stage.
19. The applicant also notes the preparation of the then emerging draft St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan (SSNP), but considers incorrectly that it has no weight in the decision-making process. Following a referendum on 5th May 2022, where 82% of respondents voted in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan, it was formally “made” by the full City and District Council on 20th July. It now forms part of the statutory development plan for St Albans City and District and must be accorded due weight in the determination of planning applications.

20. National planning policy requires that Neighbourhood Plans must be in general conformity with the adopted development plan for the area. Planning Practice Guidance advises that Neighbourhood Plans cannot generally allocate sites for housing, although they can indicate aspirational sites for future iterations of the Local Plan. Reference to the Housing Report, produced by the SSNP Steering Group, shows that a very detailed study was undertaken of potential housing sites in St Stephen Parish. Of 77 sites studied, only six locations were indicated as potentially suitable for development. These were also shown in the original draft of the SSNP - five are for housing and one for a care home. At no place in the SSNP is the application site specifically allocated for housing. Figure 4.1 of the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan shows the current Built-Up Area Boundary line which clearly demonstrates that the proposed site is not within the current Built-Up Area Boundary and it therefore sits within the Metropolitan Green Belt.
21. Therefore, the basis for decision-making remains the 1994 Local Plan Review, with the NPPF, and the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan.
22. It should be noted that the assumptions used in the formulation of the housing requirement in the recently-withdrawn Local Plan were based on outdated projections of population and households. It is clear that there are a number of factors which may affect the future calculation of housing requirements and the amount of land which may have to be allocated. These are as follows:
- a Since 2016, the two-yearly estimates of population and household formation, produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), have shown a downward trend. The next sets of (2020-based) figures are expected to show a continuation of this downward trend.
 - b The initial results of the 2021 Census show a lower rate of population increase for the City and District of St Albans, compared to earlier forecasts.
 - c As a result of Brexit, there has been a net decrease in international migration to the UK, which has particularly affected the South East and East of England and Greater London.
 - d The Covid pandemic has clearly affected the relationship between birth and death rates which will need to be taken into account.
 - e Additionally, birth rates in the UK have shown a steady downward trend since 1963, with a 9% drop in birth rate since 2009 and a drop of a further 16% predicted by 2100 (*United Nations – World Population Prospects*). The ONS reports current birth rates in the UK as approximately 1.6, which may further reduce housing requirements in the future.
23. Movements to prompt a re-evaluation of Government-imposed housing targets, based on the factors above, are increasing in number and influence. Local MP Daisy Cooper is a prominent advocate of this re-evaluation and has been campaigning for it in Parliament. District Councillor Alison Wheelhouse of Buckinghamshire County Council has launched a petition to Parliament to change the method of calculating housing targets which has well over 3,000 signatures to date. Other local councils,

including Dacorum, Three Rivers and Hertsmere, have supported the CPRE's call for a moratorium on planning decisions until new Local Plans can be put in place and have effectively paused development of their Local Plans. Residents in Bushey, concerned by plans to build on 220 acres of green belt land in Hertsmere Borough Council area, recently presented a petition with 1,300 signatures to Michael Gove, in his capacity as Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, calling on him to "cut unfair housing targets". A further petition calling on the Government to suspend all decision-making on planning applications for major developments on green belt land has recently been opened with the Petition Parliament website. Michael Gove also announced that there would be a review of the NPPF in which data and population projections may also be reviewed.

24. Daisy Cooper, supported by Leader of St Albans City and District Council Chris White, have both publicly declared that, should current data be used to re-evaluate housing targets for St Albans, the local target would be reduced from 14,000 to 7,000, and that between 5,000 and 7,000 homes could be provided using existing brownfield sites, meaning that only minimal amounts of local Green Belt land, or even none, may have to be used to satisfy housing needs. The NPPF strongly encourages regeneration and re-use of brownfield sites, especially for housing, and the Government says that brownfield sites should be given priority where practical and viable. KCG therefore concludes that the use of a Green Belt site for housing development should not be permitted before all possible brownfield sites have been utilised.
25. Led by CPRE, 25 NGOs, including The Bat Conservation Trust, Shelter, Friends of the Earth, The National Trust, RSPB and The Ramblers, in combination representing over 8.2 million people, have united in their belief that the planning system needs to be repurposed and have formed the Better Planning Coalition which is calling on the Government to reject their focus on house-building targets and to prioritise the development of thriving, sustainable communities that are in harmony with nature and the historic environment, putting people, not profits, at the heart of new developments. The Better Planning Coalition will be working with supportive MPs and peers to introduce amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the review of the NPPF with the following "six tests for planning":
 - i) Local democracy and community engagement
 - ii) Genuinely affordable housing for social rent
 - iii) Climate and sustainable development
 - iv) Biodiversity and nature's recovery
 - v) Beauty and heritage
 - vi) Health and wellbeing and access to natural green space
26. Taken together, these factors mean that there is considerable uncertainty about the basis for calculating future housing land requirements. In these circumstances, KCG asserts that this application is premature and seeks to circumvent the formal

processes of determining suitable land for development, redefinition of the Green Belt, and the determination of housing need. The allocation of large sites, and the determination of planning applications, needs to be based on up-to-date evidence which will underpin the new Local Plan.

Green Belt

27. Successive Governments have placed great emphasis on the need to protect the Green Belt. This is emphasised in paragraph 137 of the NPPF, which states as follows:

“The Government places great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open: the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.”

In terms of the NPPF (paragraphs 147 and 148) and Policy 1 of the District Local Plan Review 1994, the proposed housing scheme is clearly inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It is, by definition, clearly harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in “very special circumstances”. “Substantial weight” should be given to any harm (paragraph 148). These points are acknowledged in paragraph 8.1 of the applicant’s Planning Statement.

28. It is fully accepted by the applicant (paragraph 8.4 of the Planning Statement) that the proposed development will cause harm to the Green Belt by way of inappropriateness. It is also “indisputable” that the openness of the Green Belt will be harmed by the construction of “up to 330 affordable homes.” Nevertheless, it is claimed by the applicant that such harm would be caused at all undeveloped sites in the Green Belt.
29. The Planning Statement notes the Council’s “failure” to deliver a new Local Plan, and concludes that the withdrawn 2018 Local Plan and the supporting SKM Green Belt Review can no longer carry any weight in the decision-making process. In the applicant’s view, it is inevitable that large unallocated sites in the Green Belt must be developed if the Council is to make any impression on the affordable housing shortfall.
30. KCG concurs with the applicant that the withdrawn 2018 Local Plan and the supporting SKM Green Belt Review can no longer carry any weight in the decision-making process. However, KCG challenges the view that large unallocated sites in the Green Belt must be developed for the provision of affordable housing.
31. By virtue of its methodology the LVIA focuses on the internal characteristics of the application site. It therefore fails to see the bigger picture and the potential impact of the development on the wider area. Reference has been made to the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment 2014, which has formed part of the evidence base for local plan preparation across the county. In the study, the site is clearly located in the St Stephens Landscape Character Area (LCA10). To the west it

joins with the Bedmond Plateau (LCA9), which links with the Upper Gade Valley (LCA8). Taken together, these areas form part of a strategically important rural landscape separating St Albans, Hemel Hempstead and the Langleys. The area to the west of Chiswell Green is in the northern part of the St Stephen Plateau, which is highlighted in the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment 2014 for its expanses of woodland and wooded farmland. These characteristics are also found in the adjacent Bedmond Plateau. It is the stated view of KCG that the protection of this tract of countryside, particularly between Chiswell Green and Bedmond, is of paramount importance and the application site contributes strongly to the spatial aspect of openness in terms of the National Planning Practice Guidelines.

32. The application site clearly satisfies the conditions of the overall characteristics of the Green Belt in its openness and permanence, both in spatial and visual terms, as can be seen from the photograph and maps below showing the application site in its surroundings, where it is clear that the openness of the Green Belt to the west of Chiswell Green is enhanced by the stark contrast between the existing residential development and the countryside beyond.

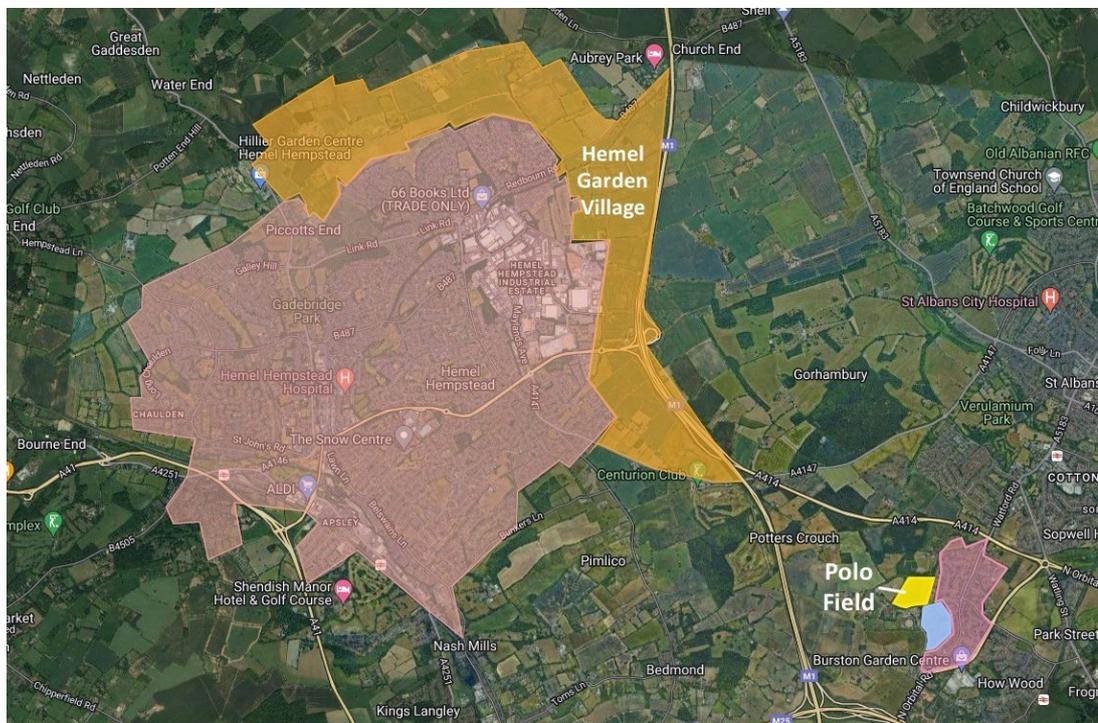


33. Furthermore, the village comprises a significant percentage of bungalows, especially on the western side, which respect the natural topography of the area and keeps the skyline low so as not to impinge on the views towards St Albans and the countryside. Any buildings 2-storeys or higher would be clearly visible beyond the existing skyline of the village.
34. Accepting that there will be some degree of harm, the Planning Statement provides an analysis of the site against the five stated purposes of the Green Belt, which are set out in paragraph 138 of the NPPF. These are as follows:
- a) *to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas*
 - b) *to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another*

- c) *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment*
- d) *to preserve the setting and the character of historic towns*
- e) *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land*

35. In terms of the first of the five purposes, the applicant makes no comment. It is important to note, however, that the site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt, where the overall purpose is to prevent the outward sprawl of Greater London into the surrounding Home Counties. In the southern part of Hertfordshire this function is especially important and cannot be ignored. Each and every part of the Green Belt makes a contribution, particularly in the context of other adjacent Local Plans and with major planning applications currently being considered for Green Belt land in Kings Langley, Abbots Langley and Leavesden.

36. The applicant dismisses the second purpose; it is contended that the nearest towns to the application site are some distance away and separated by the M1 and M25 motorways. No merger will therefore occur. KCG strongly disputes this point. In addition to the proposed developments mentioned above, no mention is made of the impact of the rapprochement with Hemel Hempstead which will result from the proposed Hemel Garden Village development to the west of St Albans. This will offer 11,000 new houses, the proposed boundary of which will dramatically narrow the gap between Chiswell Green and Hemel Hempstead. Neither is there mention of the City of St Albans to the north of the site with which there is already only minimal separation.

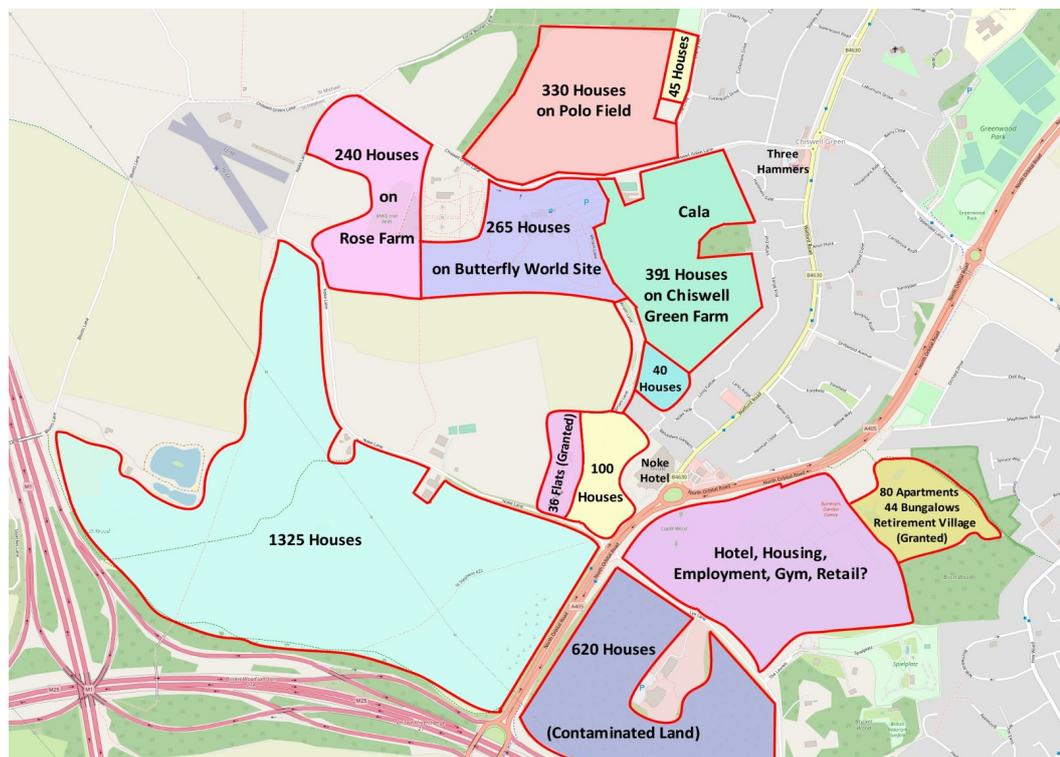


37. The third purpose is the most significant and the applicant acknowledges that encroachment on the countryside is “inevitable” but that this can be mitigated, however, by “careful landscaping”. KCG rejects this argument - the bulk of the site,

the Polo Field, is very open in nature and is part of the strong rural character of the area to the west of the village. Furthermore, the site is detached from the boundary of the village by a strip of open land. There is a very strong western edge to the village, separating the residential area from the countryside beyond. This is very clearly shown by the photographs and maps which are included in this statement.



38. There are also many pressures within the gap on the boundary with Chiswell Green shown by the attached KCG map of the “call for sites” returns to the Council. Permitting the western boundary edge from Chiswell Green into the Green Belt to be breached by one development will destroy the integrity of the boundary and cause significant further pressure to release additional tracts of land within this area.



© OpenStreetMap contributors

39. As stated above, the attached map clearly shows the pressures on the Green Belt around Chiswell Green. Included are the former Gardens of the Rose and the Butterfly World sites, as well as the current application by Cala Homes to develop land opposite the Polo Field to the south of Chiswell Green Lane (LPA ref 5/2022/0927). This shows the degree of developer speculation to the west of the village. KCG believes that granting planning permission for this application would be the tipping point for further encroachment into the Green Belt and would extend to the entire section of land to the south of Chiswell Green Lane, as far as to Noke Lane at least, if not the M25. Urban fringe influences would extend far into the important tract of countryside between Chiswell Green and Bedmond, and would cause substantial harm when measured against the third of the Green Belt purposes.
40. Against the fourth purpose, the applicant considers that the site plays no role in the setting and character of St Albans. On the contrary, KCG considers that this fails to acknowledge the proximity of the site to the central core of the city, which is dominated by the cathedral and its historic skyline. Any large-scale development in the Green Belt surrounding the city, especially to the south, would cause some degree of harm to its character.
41. The impact is not simply a matter of visual intrusion - it is also concerned with the cumulative impact of developments on the setting of an historic city. To consider the increased car usage alone, likely to be in the region of an additional 700 vehicles, there will be a detrimental impact on pollution, noise damage and structural damage as these vehicles add to the existing volume of vehicles passing often very close to 2,000 year old Roman ruins (including the only Roman Theatre in Britain), 1,000 year old Anglo-Saxon buildings such as St Michael's Church (which is the best preserved Anglo-Saxon church in the country), the Medieval St Albans Cathedral and Clock Tower, and the many Tudor buildings including the oldest pub in Britain. If KCG's fears are realised and permitting the development of the application site is indeed a catalyst for the development of the entire parcel of land to the west of Chiswell Green, this could result in an additional 3,000 vehicles negatively impacting this historic city.
42. Additionally, no consideration is given to the site's immediate proximity to the Saxon hamlet centre of Chiswell Green and the historic Three Hammers public house which is thought to date originally from the 15th century. The applicant has ignored advice in the original scoping response by St Albans Council that any application should be submitted with both a heritage statement and an archaeological impact statement, despite specialist archaeological advice sought by the Planning Department which, on two separate occasions (January and July 2022) recommends that no decision be made on the application until this information has been submitted in accordance with NPPF Policy 194. The specialist advice identifies this site as having 'historical importance' and quotes the St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994 Policy 111 which requires adequate facilities to be provided by the applicants for remains to be recorded by excavation in advance or during construction.

43. The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA), which states that the site is largely artificial and devoid of natural features. It is concluded that limited harm would be caused to an artificial landscape with little visual appeal. This point is refuted by KCG and the many local residents who enjoy the open views in and around the site.
44. The NPPF, at paragraph 174, requires that planning decisions should seek to conserve and enhance the natural environment by “recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside”. Although taken this summer while the fields were scorched from the persistent high temperatures, the aerial video footage of the site demonstrates the intrinsic character and beauty of the application site and its position within the wider parcel of Green Belt. This can be viewed on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-iGY3DhlhY>

Land as an essential natural asset

45. Defined in the 1950s, the five purposes of the Green Belt do not yet recognise the value of the Green Belt as a critical natural asset. The November 2018 Land Use Report by the Committee on Climate Change highlights that land provides us with clean water, food and timber, it naturally sequesters and stores carbon, and is the natural regulation for hazards such as flooding. It is therefore an essential resource to mitigate climate change. However, this report also highlights that social, economic and environmental pressures present significant risks to the services provided by the land and that these essential functions will not be maintained for future generations if land is not managed more effectively in this century.
46. Additionally, the Green Belt serves as an essential environment for the ecosystems which underpin all human life and activities. The benefits provided to humans by ecosystems have been recognised for decades, but equally recognised is the fact that human activities are destroying biodiversity and altering the capacity of previously healthy ecosystems to deliver the benefits of the provision of water, timber, air purification, soil formation and pollination, as well as the basis for the entire functioning of the food chain.
47. During the Covid pandemic, the value of the Green Belt to communities for leisure, sport, family activities and physical and mental health became very apparent, with many more people now continuing to enjoy the opportunities offered by the Green Belt. Additionally, the Green Belt continues to offer its traditional benefits to the community of green and open space for recreation, community activities such as Scouting, cycling and running, and locations for walking and enjoying nature which is of benefit to physical and mental health. The lanes around the application site are also part of the nationally-known Annual St Albans Half Marathon, and form the back-drop for a wider audience to enjoy the beauty of the Hertfordshire countryside.

48. More recently the war in Ukraine and its impact on world crop availability has again highlighted the growing concerns around the UK's huge consequential reliance on food imports (the UK imports nearly 50% of its food, a figure which has been consistent for over 20 years). The UK currently imports wheat to supplement its own production, but has historically been able to produce enough to be able to export too. A soil assessment at the application site demonstrates that the soil is classed as ALC subgrade 3a (good quality agricultural land) and subgrade 3b (moderate quality agricultural land), all of which is already suitable for crop production and is currently recorded in the applicant's Flood Risk Assessment Part 1 as being used for the production of micro-salads and hay. The soil could easily be improved for wider usage with good yields. In order to reduce food miles, and at a time when would-be farmers are finding it very difficult to find farms to occupy, the application site could be used for food production.
49. The planning case officer's draft report considered the loss of agricultural land as an issue. The applicant's Planning Statement, however, is dismissive of the point, and it is a fact that the consideration of agricultural land value has been downgraded in the latest version of the NPPF. As referenced by the applicant, it has also not been afforded much weight in recent appeal decisions and planning applications. Nevertheless, the site is acknowledged to be Grade 3a and 3b and is capable of growing crops, and in view of the current global food and energy crisis, KCG would suggest that its potential loss should not be taken lightly.
50. A further benefit of the Green Belt is to act as a natural soakaway for surface water from rain. The Flood Risk Assessment for the site is noted, but residents have expressed concerns about potential increases in surface water flooding which do not appear to have been taken into account. Chiswell Green Lane and the lanes to the west of the application site already experience significant flooding in times of heavy rainfall. With the development of almost 15 hectares of land, and therefore an increase in the coverage of hard surfaces, these incidents are expected to increase.
51. Furthermore, the removal of the application site from the Green Belt will lead to an increased amount of water that will have to feed into local waste water systems. This water will be run-off from hard landscaping and roads and will therefore be contaminated with particles of poly-aromatic hydrocarbons, metals such as copper and zinc, and microplastics, which is contaminating the UK's fresh water rivers and decimating aquatic life and ecosystems, including the internationally protected local chalk stream, the River Ver (*information from Jo Bradley of charity Stormwater Shepherds*).

52. Separately, as has been recently reported by the Ver Valley Society, raw sewage was spilled into the headwaters of the River Ver for 2,642 hours in 2021, or over 100 continuous days, due to the inability of the current waste water systems to cope with the existing demands of the local population. The cost and work involved in improving this situation means that it is unlikely to improve for many years to come. The additional demands that would be placed on this system as a result of the removal of the application site from the Green Belt and the additional needs of an estimated 800 new residents will only exacerbate an existing ecological disaster.
53. The increasing global temperatures, demonstrated acutely this summer with long periods of exceptionally high temperatures, highlights the role played by wooded and grassy areas in acting as an absorber of heat. Recent testing by local turf grower, George Davies Turf, demonstrated that large areas of grass reduced the surface level temperature by approximately 6° compared to an ambient temperature of near 40°, a figure which supports recent studies of woodland temperatures demonstrating a difference of up to 15°. Comparatively, areas of artificial surfaces were recording temperatures up to 30° higher than the ambient temperatures. Overall, therefore, the role of expanses of Green Belt in stopping urban areas from overheating cannot be underestimated, particularly around the Greater London area.
54. Public Health England, supported by the recently revised NPPF at planning objective 8b, confirms that the planning system has a social objective to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, supporting their health and social wellbeing. The impact of air quality and noise pollution on health and well-being is now widely acknowledged, as is the role played by the Green Belt in absorbing airborne and acoustic pollutants. The loss of this swathe of green space close to the boundary of the built-up area of Chiswell Green will have a material impact in reducing the health and well-being of the local residents, in particular the young, elderly and vulnerable, of which there are many in Chiswell Green, and who will be the first to feel the impact of its loss.
55. In addition, KCG supports the objections by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust that the ecology of the application site has been underestimated by the applicant. While the centre of the application site, particularly where used as a polo field or for horse grazing, may not host a vast array of flora and fauna, local inhabitants have, for years, appreciated the presence of insects, birds, animals and plants evident around the application site. The area is home to relatively common animals such as muntjac deer, foxes and hedgehogs, but also to protected species such as badgers which are seen regularly in certain back gardens along the rural boundary edges and sadly as victims of collisions with vehicles in the country lanes nearby. Red Kites, entirely extinct in England and Scotland from around 1870, are now slowly returning to southern England and can be seen daily at the application site, along with many other varieties of bird. Barn Owls are likely to be present in the mature trees around the site. Despite the closure of the Butterfly World, the rare “small blue” butterfly can still be evidenced in the fields opposite the application site. Multiple varieties of bat forage in the fields in and around the application site, nest in the trees and

buildings nearby, and can be seen in number in the evenings. Animals, birds and plants do not respect the boundaries imposed on humans by legal tenure, but are extremely sensitive to any possible threats. Any construction work at the site is likely to have a fatal impact not just on the ecology of the site itself but also extending quite a distance from the site boundaries.

56. The Ecology Appraisal accompanying the application found “no evidence” of protected species, badger setts, bat roosts or reptiles and amphibians on the site and considered their likely presence to be negligible. No breeding birds were found, although their presence in the hedgerows was considered to be moderate. However, from the many responses received on the Council web pages, these findings are contested by local residents. The focus of the appraisal has been on the site itself, with little reference to its perimeter or surroundings. The survey was conducted during daylight hours, on one day, from ground-level only, and insufficient account has been taken of the range of habitats and species in the surrounding rural area.
57. Under the terms of the Environment Act 2021, and supported by the NPPF Policy 174 and BS 42020, major development schemes are expected to demonstrate a net gain in biodiversity. In their initial response to the application, the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust objected to the application on the grounds that no assessment of biodiversity net gain had been undertaken and that it was therefore not possible to assess the application in accordance with the obligation for biodiversity net gain as stipulated. This obligation was reinforced in the Appeal Decision made by Planning Inspector Graham Chamberlain in July 2019 (APP/M2270/W/18/3215766) that stated that an “empirical means of measuring” should be submitted to ensure a net gain could be achieved.
58. HMWT re-iterated its objection in a memorandum posted on 15th July, which stated that the requirements of BS4020 had still not been discharged. With these failings in the ecological survey data, it is impossible for the applicant to make an accurate assessment of existing biodiversity and thereby to make any claim of net biodiversity gain.
59. To summarise, KCG believes that the applicant, in their support documents, undervalues the contribution of the site to the functions of the Green Belt. For the reasons stated above, KCG believes that the application site does make a substantial contribution to the functions of the Green Belt and its aims of preventing urban sprawl and keeping land permanently open, as well as as a natural asset. Once developed, this part of the Green Belt would be lost for all time. It should not be sacrificed.

Transport and Highways

60. The original application was accompanied by a Transport Assessment, prepared for the applicant by Milestone Transport Planning Limited. Although there had been pre-application meetings with HCC Highways, a number of issues were not resolved.

The formal response from the highways authority, in February, recommended refusal of the application. The reasons were stated as follows:

“The proposal fails to comply with Hertfordshire County Council’s Local Transport Plan policies relating to sustainable development (Policies 1. Transport User Hierarchy 5. Development Management), specifically further information requiring bus services is required and further investigation into cycling infrastructure beyond Chiswell Green shops.”

61. Accordingly, the planning officer’s report to the Referrals Committee also recommended refusal on the following grounds:

“Adequate promotion of sustainable transport has not been demonstrated - the proposal is contrary to the aims of paragraphs 110 and 112 of the NPPF and the relevant parts of Policies 34 & 35 of the Local Plan.”

The recommendation, and the officer’s analysis in the report, was welcomed by the many residents and local organisations who had objected to the proposal on transport and highways grounds.

62. In May 2022, an addendum to the applicant’s Transport Statement was completed by Milestone and posted on the Council website. The well-written report was long and comprehensive in its scope, seeking to address all the criticisms and requirements which had been set out by HCC Highways. The detailed proposals in the assessment are concerned with access to public transport, and improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure. There are also proposals for inclusion in a Section 106 Agreement.
63. KCG has read the two transport assessments carefully, and notes the suggested measures to mitigate the impact of the additional vehicles that would be generated by the proposed development. However, KCG believes that neither the Transport Assessment nor the Addendum fully address the impact of the proposed development on the highways network on the immediate or wider areas. Equally, KCG asserts that the measures suggested will not be successful in creating long-term sustainable travel patterns and behaviour, and that the development will cause a significant cumulative impact on highway safety and the operational capacity of the surrounding transport network, as well as a significant impact on the existing residents of Chiswell Green Lane.
64. The Transport Assessment of November 2021 (TA Nov21) (paragraphs 5.31 and 5.32, and Table 5.2) uses 2011 Census data to estimate likely levels of vehicle ownership within the proposed development. It concludes that the average number of cars per household would be 1.7, giving a total number of vehicles generated by the proposed development as 561 (not 559 as stated in paragraph 5.32), a horrifying increase of approximately 470% of current vehicle ownership in Chiswell Green Lane.

65. The 2011 Census is now outdated with data from the 2021 Census already becoming available, so the quoted average number of cars per household of 1.7 is also outdated. Anecdotal evidence would also indicate that this figure has risen.
66. The applicant has applied the 'saved policies' of the SACDC's 1994 Local Plan Review 1994 and Revised Parking Policies and Standards (January 2002) to calculate that there should be an allowance for 626 vehicles for householders and 165 vehicles for visitors (TA Nov21 paragraphs 5.27 to 5.30) in the proposed development. Applying the figure of 626 vehicles for household ownership would give the rate of car ownership as 1.9 and the number of vehicles generated by the site as a gargantuan 520% increase in vehicle ownership in Chiswell Green Lane.
67. Inevitably, this is causing great consternation amongst those living in Chiswell Green Lane and the surrounding areas, with concerns about the access to the proposed development and the volume of traffic using already pressurised roads in the area.
68. The initial section of road from Watford Road at the eastern end towards the application site is a quiet residential section of largely differing style properties, becoming more rural with a farmhouse and paddocks on the left and bungalows to the right, before the Green Belt boundary and the change from a two-track to single-track lane and speed limit increase from 30mph to 60mph. Chiswell Green Lane would currently expect to host approximately 120 vehicles from the existing households; the addition of approximately 630 more vehicles passing along the lane to access the built-up area road network is causing considerable anguish amongst the residents who rightly assert that this would completely change the character of the area in which they have chosen to live because of its rural nature, and cause significant disturbance 24 hours a day by the nature of the work patterns of an entire development of key workers who are often obliged to work unsociable hours.



Chiswell Green Lane looking from east to west ©2022 Google

The site entrance is inappropriate

69. The only entrance to the site gives onto a narrow country lane with a 60mph speed limit, which the Transport Assessment describes as a “quiet rural lane”. A planning application by the applicant in February 2017, decided on appeal in December 2021, sought to use an agricultural barn on the proposed development site for the repair of commercial vehicles. The appeal against the refusal was dismissed “*by reason of unacceptable adverse impact on the safe and free flow of traffic on Chiswell Green Lane to the detriment of all users of the highway*”.
70. This rural lane is heavily used by traffic cutting across country to Bedmond, the Langleys, Leverstock Green and Hemel Hempstead, as well as being the key access to the homes and businesses which are located in these lanes (The Royal Entomological Society, Plaistows Airfield and Hanrox Turkeys for example).
71. Despite an access via Miriam Lane, and a restriction on heavy good vehicles using Chiswell Green Lane, an assessment of the lane is not complete without consideration of the impact of the illegal businesses which are now operating from the site of the former Butterfly World and at Rose Farm. The absence of planning approvals and the lack of enforcement of planning conditions has resulted in multiple businesses establishing themselves on these sites, operating 7 days a week. The Butterfly World site illegally offers services including vehicle recovery and storage, the parking of removal company lorries, party buses, the sale of used cars and vans, and the repair of vehicles including police vehicles. Rose Farm is the head office of construction company, Boom Construction, which undertakes multi-million pound construction projects. Chiswell Green Lane is also used as a secondary route to access Miriam Lane by vehicles who have missed their turning into Noke Lane on the northbound section of the A405 between M25 roundabout and the Noke roundabout.



Photo courtesy of a resident of Chiswell Green Lane



The current illegal use of the former Butterfly World site

72. The transit of numerous vehicles along this single-track lane has created a significant number of “passing bays”, formed over time by repeated movements of vehicles up onto the verges and into the shrubbery along both sides of the lane to permit for the passing of vehicles which would otherwise not be possible in most places.



Chiswell Green Lane looking west from the current entrance to the Polo Field ©2022 Google

73. The attractive rural nature of these lanes also makes them highly desirable for many leisure activities enjoyed by the local population and by visitors to the area, some of whom come to Chiswell Green for the popular annual Half Marathon which takes place around these lanes and attracts participants from as far afield as Newcastle and Europe. Local clubs include running clubs, Striders, cycling clubs, Scout groups, and local schools conducting Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. The lanes and surrounding fields and public footpaths are also well used by individuals and families for running, cycling and walking, and the popularity of going out into these lanes has only increased since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.
74. It should be pointed out that these lanes are closed to traffic for periods of 8 hours or so on the occasions of certain race activities in order to protect the competitors from interference from vehicles. On these occasions, the sole entrance to the proposed development would be inaccessible during that time.
75. KCG takes this opportunity to support the Ramblers’ Association in their concerns over the proposed changes to convert public footpaths FP80 and FP82 into shared pedestrian and cyclist routes which appear too narrow to accommodate the space necessary for the separation.

76. The site entrance is proposed to exit onto Chiswell Green Lane at the mid-point between the pathway to the small row of labourers' cottages which run perpendicular to the lane and the other properties, and the entrance to the parking area for the cottages. The only access between the two points is via Chiswell Green Lane, so residents are required to walk along this single-track country lane where there is already no pavement while vehicles pass at 60mph as they pick up speed heading out into the countryside. The applicant is proposing that the lane should be narrowed at this section with a give-way barrier at the eastern end to prevent cars from passing each other, with priority to those heading west, while pedestrians are using the same stretch of single-track lane to gain access to their parking area and vehicles. This is causing significant consternation amongst the residents of these cottages, who are justifiably concerned about the danger of personal injury that the addition of approximately 630 more vehicles habitually utilising this small section of rural lane will bring, this in addition to the danger, noise, disruption and inconvenience from the accompanying larger-sized refuse, delivery and emergency vehicles. Access points are highlighted by the bright red circular indicators on the diagram below.



77. At the eastern end of this narrowed section, the applicant proposes to remove a section of verge parking where there is currently ample space for local residents of Chiswell Green Lane, and to replace it with 10 car parking spaces in the planned memorial car park (TAA paragraphs 2.11 to 2.14). The applicant assumes the verge parking is used by residents of numbers 46 and 48 Chiswell Green Lane, and proposes to link these two properties to the memorial car park by a small footpath. Apart from the obvious limit that this imposes on residents of Chiswell Green Lane and the erroneous assumption that the verge parking is only used by residents of 46 and 48 Chiswell Green Lane, the reality is that householders do not want to park

away from their homes, and particularly not in a car park setting which offers opportunities to those so-minded for vandalism, theft and threat to personal security. The applicant asserts in TAA paragraph 3.2 that the allocation of these 10 spaces in the memorial car park would avoid the need to implement parallel parking spaces along the southern side of the Chiswell Green Lane carriageway, but does not consider the proposal by Cala Homes that the carriageway referred to could be the location of a 2FE primary school, in which case, the need for transient parking there will be considerable. The applicant also does not consider the extensive on street parking which results from overflow from the amenities at the village centre in Chiswell Green.

The increased traffic cannot be accommodated by the local area

78. As is demonstrated by the traffic survey conducted on behalf of the applicant along Chiswell Green Lane (TA Nov21 Table 4.3 and Appendix 5), volumes of vehicular movements are currently low, in keeping with a residential road leading to the open countryside. Daily eastbound movements (towards Chiswell Green village) totalled 418 and westbound 317, equating to 735 two-way movements per day. At its busiest during peak periods, the maximum observed equated to 1 two-way movement each minute.
79. The TA Nov21 (paragraphs 6.3 to 6.5, 6.10, and Table 6.1) shows that the proposed development is expected to generate 2,584 two-way movements each day (versus the existing 735), with 296 during the AM weekday rush hour alone - 8am to 9am. This equates to a colossal increase of 350% in daily two-way movements, and an even greater increase of nearly 430% during the peak AM rush hour - 3 to 4 two-way movements per minute.
80. The TA Nov21 (paragraphs 6.15 to 6.17 and summarised in Table 6.6) highlights that the majority - 96.8% - of vehicular traffic generated by the development would travel in an easterly direction along Chiswell Green Lane towards the double mini-roundabout. According to the TA Nov21, this equates to 218 two-way movements during the AM rush hour and 178 during the PM rush hour.
81. Of this, 66% of the traffic from the proposed development would travel north at the double mini-roundabout – split 43% north onto the Watford Road and then right into Tippendell Lane towards the A405 North Orbital Road, and 23% north onto the Watford Road and on north towards St Albans City Centre.
82. 32 % of the traffic from the proposed development would turn south at the double mini-roundabout towards the Noke Hotel and M25. This would equate to 71 two-way movements in the AM rush hour, and 58 in the PM rush hour.
83. The TA Nov21 (paragraph 4.55, Table 4.4) uses the PICADY/ARCADY assessment to demonstrate the operational capacity of the double mini-roundabout junction. With RFC values of 0.85-0.9, this junction is currently considered to be operating within its theoretical capacity, but at the very higher end, and, as acknowledged by the

applicant in TA Nov21 paragraph 4.58, over capacity during the weekday AM and PM rush hours. This supports local opinion and is not surprising as the Watford Road through Chiswell Green is already the most congested B-road in Hertfordshire (*Hertfordshire Transport Planning and Data Team - Hertfordshire Traffic and Transport Data Report 2019 p26 Fig 3.2.1*).

84. In accordance with the standard assessment for the impact of the development on the local network capacity, predictions of traffic flows 5 years forward to 2026, to include anticipated natural growth in traffic plus the impact of any committed development, have also been modelled. It is expected that the proposed development would increase the traffic using this junction by 5% and, therefore, the capacity of the junction will be exceeded even before the impact of any future growth or committed developments is considered.
85. The results of the assessment reflect the concerns of KCG and local residents about the increases in traffic at this busy junction, which is at the centre of the village. Close to the junction are a number of shops, on both sides of the road, and the Three Hammers public house. On the west side, there is the Co-op supermarket, which is accessed from Chiswell Green Lane; the entrance is currently very dangerous as there is only space for one car to enter or exit at a time and no visibility splays, resulting in this being a blind entrance and exit for vehicular users. This entrance is also used by large delivery vehicles to the Co-op and to the Three Hammers public house, which exacerbates the problems of congestion and road safety, both on Chiswell Green Lane and on the Watford Road.
86. Although there is some other off-street car parking, there is acute competition for the few on-street spaces near to the shops, in particular serving the chemist, which is greatly valued by the village's more elderly inhabitants. Additionally, the popularity of Simmons Bakery causes significant parking problems in the village with numerous vehicles filling up the assigned parking area outside that parade of shops and also parking on pavements and on double-yellow lines. As a result, there is significant overflow parking onto Chiswell Green Lane itself, turning the road effectively into a single-track road.
87. The problem of the reduced carriageway at Chiswell Green Lane as a result of substantial on-street parking is of major significance when considering access to Stanley Avenue where there is also a significant volume of on street parking, particularly close to the junction with Chiswell Green Lane. Cars turning out of and into Stanley Avenue are at regular risk of collision as they manoeuvre to avoid parked cars on both roads.
88. In the Transport Assessment of February 2022 (paragraph 5.22), the applicant proposes to narrow this stretch of road permanently in order to accommodate a raised table feature at the intersection with Stanley Avenue to give priority to pedestrians and cyclists to cross Stanley Avenue. It is also hoped by the applicant that this will discourage residents of the proposed development from using Stanley Avenue to avoid the congestion at the Watford Road double mini-roundabout.

89. As Stanley Avenue is already heavily used as an alternative route to avoid the congestion on the Watford Road, the approximately 630 additional vehicles generated by the proposed Polo Field development will dramatically increase the volume of traffic wishing to use this route, as it would offer the dual advantage of being nearer to the proposed development than the Watford Road and less congested.
90. Even if only half the vehicles generated by the development were to use Stanley Avenue, this would equate to an additional 315 vehicles. Residents of Stanley Avenue are understandably concerned at the increased danger this will present; the majority of residents would expect to reverse their vehicles off their drives into the road, the road is used by pedestrians, including school children, walking to Killigrew School in preference to the busier Watford Road, and there are always significant numbers of vehicles parked along both sides of the road as obstacles to be negotiated.
91. Any attempt to limit the numbers of vehicles using Stanley Avenue can only result in these vehicles using the Chiswell Green Lane/Watford Road junction where the applicant admits the double mini-roundabout junction already operates *“close to or near capacity, as reflected in the RFC values exceeding the 0.85 threshold, in turn leading to excessive queue lengths and delays during the weekday AM and PM peak hour periods”* (TA Nov21 paragraph 7.19).

Impact of other committed development must be considered

92. In his response in February 2022 to the applicant’s Transport Assessment of November 2021, James Dale of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) stated that *“Assessing the impact of the development on the capacity of the network is routinely set against five years post application (2026), taking into account background traffic growth and any significant committed development”*.
93. The TA (paragraph 4.20) highlights the possible future improvement of the Noke roundabout as a result of an approved planning application for a 150 bed hotel, conference and function centre (planning reference 5/2015/0722) which would allow for a fifth arm to be added to the roundabout to provide the main vehicular access to the proposed hotel.
94. Dating from 2015, this planning permission has no doubt now lapsed, but plans were submitted under the Council’s “call for sites” last autumn for a larger hotel on the same site. It would, therefore, be reasonable to assume that a hotel will be approved for this site and the traffic that may be generated from the proposed hotel should be taken into account when assessing the impact of vehicles from the Polo Field development. However, it was agreed in pre-application advice from HCC that the impact of the proposed Polo Field development on the 4-arm Noke roundabout junction need not be considered as part of the application.

95. KCG concurs that a new hotel is unlikely to add significant volumes of traffic to the local road network as it is more likely that users of the hotel will either be local already or will predominantly use the main arterial routes of M25 and M1.
96. However, pre-application advice from HCC recommended investigation into the impact of the Strategic Rail Freight Interchange on the local road network. Despite huge publicity and public outcry surrounding the approved Strategic Rail Freight Interchange and its impact on east and south St Albans specifically, the applicant states that the Strategic Rail Freight Interchange “*would not have a material impact on the local highway network*”. Its impact has therefore not been considered (TA Nov21 paragraph 7.2).
97. It is widely accepted that the Strategic Rail Freight Interchange Terminal will generate thousands of additional vehicle journeys per day along the A414, A405 and M25, and the increased volumes of HGV traffic will indubitably cause local traffic to look for alternative routes to avoid congestion. Whether via Watling Street, Robert Avenue or Tippendell Lane, these alternative routes will certainly include the Watford Road through Chiswell Green.
98. KCG therefore strongly asserts that the Strategic Rail Freight Interchange project will have considerable impact on the local road network and its impact should certainly be investigated before any decision is made to add still further volumes of traffic to the most congested B-road in the county.
99. Additionally, KCG highlights that the approved Burston Garden Retirement Village has not been mentioned or factored into any assessment of the impact of committed development on the local road network (LPA reference 5/2020/3022). While the application was initially refused, it was granted permission to proceed at an appeal hearing in January 2022, before the Transport Assessment Addendum for the Polo Field site was produced (May 2022).
100. Vehicle movements generated from the 80 assisted living apartments and 44 care bungalows are not expected to be significant. However, what is material to the consideration of the proposed development are the changes to the road network that will be undertaken as part of the Burston Garden Retirement Village development - notably the traffic lights on the A405 at the entrance to the Retirement Village. The traffic lights will have the intended effect of slowing traffic along this busy stretch of dual carriageway, causing queues of traffic at the lights. Local traffic will look to avoid this route and will prefer to re-route their journeys via Tippendell Lane, Robert Avenue or Watling Street and the Watford Road, increasing the volumes of traffic which will be using these already pressurised routes.
101. Although not a committed development, it must also be considered that there is another application for a major development with proposed access points on Chiswell Green Lane opposite the Polo Field application site - the application by Cala Homes for 391 houses on land to the south of Chiswell Green Lane, LPA reference 5/2022/0927. Although not all the properties proposed by Cala Homes would be

accessed from Chiswell Green Lane, a transport assessment by Glanville proposes that the Chiswell Green Lane access to the Cala Homes site would serve approximately 450 vehicles, before the impact of a possible 2FE primary school is taken into account. The consequent impact of two major developments, not just on Chiswell Green Lane, but on the entire village of Chiswell Green, cannot be ignored. KCG has major concerns about the cumulative impact of what would be an overall increase in traffic in the village of 54% should both applications be approved.

102. It would appear that County Council officers are also concerned about the possible cumulative effects, which were raised in a note from HCC Highways to the Council, posted on 14th June 2022. It concluded thus:

“Naturally, if two major planning applications that include primary accesses in close proximity, and show similar off-site commitments to infrastructure provision will require clear understanding of how, in practice, each development will be implemented both separately and together.”

Proposals to reduce traffic volumes will be ineffective

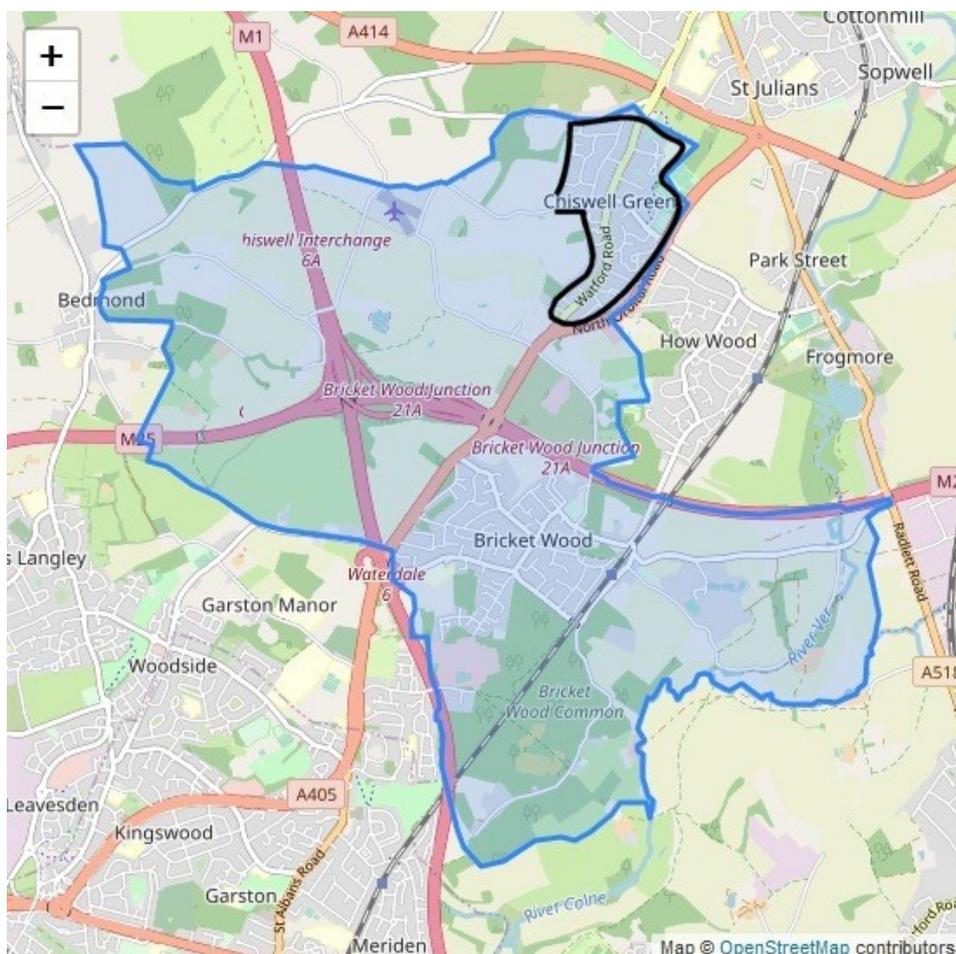
103. The TAA, at Appendix 2, shows a number of off-site highways improvements which could be included in a Section 106 obligation. These are focused, however, on the immediate vicinity of the site, from Chiswell Green Lane to the double roundabout on the Watford Road at the centre of the village. Although some of these proposals are to be welcomed, they fail to address the potential impact of traffic on the immediate surroundings and on the village shopping centre.
104. In their February 2022 response to the proposed development application, HCC acknowledged that the applicant has tried to ensure that “priority is given to more sustainable forms of transport and opportunities to reduce demand to use private cars”. However, HCC came to the conclusion that the mitigation proposals included in the application would not achieve “meaningful changes in travel behaviour” or the changes in modal share that they are looking for.
105. The TA Nov21 (Table 6.2) details that 75% of households in the area travel to work by private car, 13% by public transport, and 6% walk or cycle. This would translate into 1,947 of the potential 2,584 daily two-way trips from the proposed development being by car, 328 by public transport, and 148 by bicycle or on foot.
106. HCC quotes NPPF 110a in asking the applicant to demonstrate that “appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be - or have been - taken up, given the type of development and its location”. In particular, HCC has asked the applicant to concentrate on reducing the reliance on private cars.
107. Consequently, the applicant produced an Addendum to the original Transport Assessment, detailing various proposals to reduce car usage amongst residents of the proposed development and to promote transport by more sustainable means - bus and bicycle in particular.

108. Much as KCG supports all efforts to achieve a sustainable shift away from reliance on private car usage and to promote greener methods of transport, sadly, KCG does not agree that the proposals offered by the applicant will achieve the meaningful changes in travel behaviour claimed by the applicant.

109. The Transport Assessment Addendum May 2022 (TAA) at paragraphs 2.16 to 2.23 and Tables 2.1 to 2.4 relies heavily on data from the 2011 Census. However, these data are now irrelevant for the following reasons:

- i) the data are now 11 years old and have been superseded by the 2021 Census whose data are already becoming available
- ii) the progress of time has changed living and working patterns with the relative demise or creation of different industries
- iii) in particular, the Covid-19 pandemic has radically changed working and living habits

110. Furthermore, local residents do not recognise the results of the St Albans MSOA work destination surveys (TAA Tables 2.1 - 2.4) as having any bearing on the reality of the area. Results indicate that there were only 425 respondents of the survey at a time when the population of Chiswell Green was 2,800, and Chiswell Green formed only a small part of the surveyed St Albans 020 MSOA area. Its results cannot therefore be seen as representative.



Unrealistic assumptions regarding bicycle travel in the St Albans area

111. The data in TAA Table 2.1 purports to represent those living in the area who walk or cycle to work destinations. However, based on a sample size of 30 respondents 11 years ago, it is irrelevant. Suggestions of commuting via bicycle to work destinations in Watford, Barnet and even north St Albans would be greeted with ridicule in current times by those with knowledge of the area due to the danger of cycling on dangerous and busy roads. The TAA Table 2.1 indicates that travel to school in areas St Albans 014 and 017 are eminently viable, but takes no consideration of the fact that it is not safe, even on side roads around Chiswell Green and St Albans, to travel by bicycle during rush hours, particularly if children are included in the journey.
112. HCC Traffic Speed and Volume Records from 2021 show that, although traffic flows through Stanley Avenue are an average of 60 vehicles an hour, vehicle speeds can be up to 40mph which represents a considerable risk to cyclists when it is considered that this is a busy residential road with many parked cars and other obstacles. HCC Traffic Speed and Volume Records (Appendix 1) demonstrate that, during the AM peak hour, 1,231 vehicles use the stretch of road where the applicant proposes to change a Pelican crossing into a Toucan crossing at Stanmount Road to West Avenue (Killigrew School). Cyclists can already use the Pelican crossing; proposals to create Toucan crossings from existing Pelican crossings, or to re-paint road and pavement markings to indicate cycle lanes do not add to the safety or popularity of cycling.
113. The journey distances may be commutable, but an assessment of distance pays no regard to the practicalities of the journey. Cycling to work requires consideration of carrying items required for the workplace, attire appropriate for cycling not being necessarily appropriate for the work environment, and the weather and physical effort required in cycling resulting in an appearance unsuitable for work (bedraggled, windswept, sweating etc). In addition, the proposed cycle routes are not direct and will therefore increase the actual distance travelled, and therefore the time. These factors will discourage cyclists from using these routes for commuting purposes.
114. Assumptions such as these also disregard topography - critical in an area such as St Albans. Travel from Chiswell Green to St Albans city centre or to the north side of St Albans is all uphill as Chiswell Green residents are well aware when it snows and they are unable to get to the other side of St Albans, even by car. Where cycling is “difficult”, there is a significantly reduced appetite for it.

Reduced levels of travel for work and leisure by public transport

115. TAA Table 2.2 purports to demonstrate the number of residents who would use rail as a means of public transport. Again, however, the data date from 2011 and the sample size is too small to be representative (341). More significantly, while the 341 residents surveyed use public rail transport to commute to work, these data do not detail how the residents travel from home to the various stations from which their journeys originate. In the case of residents of Chiswell Green, this initial stage of a rail journey is, for many reasons, via car.

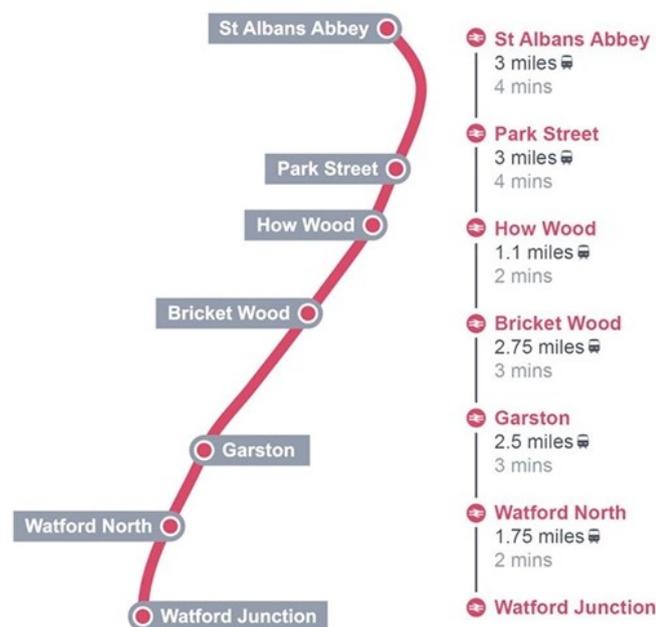
116. TAA Table 2.3 purports to demonstrate that many journeys are taken by residents of Chiswell Green to their place of work by public bus. A sample size of 54 respondents in 2011 is again irrelevant to today's environment, in particular as the majority of the destinations cited in the survey are not accessible by direct public bus from Chiswell Green. In fact, some of these locations would only be accessible by taking a bus in the opposite direction to the destination first (Barnet, Hemel etc).
117. TAA Table 2.4 is now also totally meaningless, again dating from 2011. The progress of time has dramatically changed people's habits, in particular away from shopping, leisure and work, cited by Table 2.4 as the three primary reasons for journeys (63%). Shopping has become an "out of town" activity in St Albans or more particularly, an online activity - both for food and household shopping as well as for clothes, household goods, gifts etc; Amazon, DPD, Parcelforce and all the major supermarkets now have a presence in every road every day.
118. The natural progress of this trend was rapidly escalated by the Covid-19 pandemic which forced everyone to consider home deliveries, and the move to working from home seems likely to remain for many people, at least in part. Moves to introduce a 4-day working week and a preference for working at home when infection rates are higher will also change the balance of journeys undertaken going forward.
119. Furthermore, the cost of living crisis, which is pushing prices up in all areas of spending, will result in a reduction in expenditure on leisure activities and shopping for some years to come as the country lives through what is forecast by the World Bank to be the deepest global recession since the Second World War (*June 2020 Global Economic Prospects*), by the IMF as the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s (*April 2020 World Economic Outlook*) and by the Bank of England as the longest recession in the UK since the banking crisis of 2008 (*4th August 2022 - Monetary Policy Report*).
120. It is assumed by the TAA paragraph 2.24 that there is no impediment to changing the mode of transport for a given journey, other than distance. This is clearly impractical; while residents may be persuaded to walk half a kilometre to local shops to buy a single item, those travelling to supermarkets to do their weekly shopping are highly unlikely to swap their car for public transport.
121. What should also be considered is that travel by public transport has been decreased by concerns over health and the transmission of Covid-19, a situation that does not appear will resolve itself in the near future, and is likely to see fluctuating demand for public transport with a noticeable decrease in the winter months when infection rates are higher. Taking journeys by car, alone or in family groups, is now seen as a pragmatic and sensible mechanism to avoid unnecessary contact with other members of the public and reduce the risks of infection.

Few local amenities accessible on foot or by bicycle

122. TAA paragraph 2.24 and Figure 2 attempt to demonstrate that there is a broad range of amenities within 5km of the application site of which the proposed households could avail on foot or by bicycle. KCG concurs that the Co-op (1), convenience store (2), Pharmacy (3), Three Hammers public house (4) and bakery (2) at the centre of Chiswell Green serve exactly that purpose, and that the Starbucks Coffee outlet (14) near Burston Garden Centre may also attract some business (although with the average cost of a cup of coffee in the UK at £3.40, this is likely only to attract a very small amount of business from key workers - the intended inhabitants of the proposed development).
123. KCG suggests, however, that the other amenities referenced by the TAA Figure 2 are highly unlikely to be accessed on foot or by cycle. The Post Office (5 & 6) is a little outside the village centre and, while convenient for those passing it *en route* to the centre of Chiswell Green, it would need to be a destination in its own right for residents from the application site to visit. In this case, it is a likely destination for the despatch of parcels which may not be easy to transport on foot or by bicycle.
124. Burston Garden Centre (7) is not currently suitable for pedestrian or cycle access due to its location on a dual carriageway, and unless the purpose of the visit were to enjoy the coffee shop, purchases from Burston's are highly likely to be considered as requiring vehicular transport.
125. The Livery Yard and Riding School referenced (8) is in the process of closing down in (premature) anticipation of an approval for the Cala Homes development to the south of Chiswell Green Lane. All livery horses have been given notice and have left the site. Visitors to the riding school are usually children, dropped off by parents in vehicles as the riding school gives onto a single carriageway lane with no pavements and a 60mph speed limit, described for the St Albans Local Plan 2018/2019 Infrastructure Delivery Plan Part 7 by Glanville Highways and Transport Planning Group as "countryside ... with dense vegetation on both sides of the road".
126. Midway Surgery (10) is highly unlikely to attract pedestrian journeys; those attending the surgery are sick or attending to escort sick children or the elderly. The site is also gives onto a wide stretch of unfettered road often assumed to carry a dual carriageway speed limit which is therefore unappealing to cross.
127. The Mercure Noke Hotel (11) is closed to visitors and has been used for private purposes for over 3 years. It is currently being used to house refugees.
128. The Shell Petrol Station (12) and Little Waitrose (13) are unlikely pedestrian or cycle destinations for residents of the proposed development. Petrol stations are, by their nature, designed to serve vehicles, and the Little Waitrose is an unlikely grocery shopping destination for key workers when the Co-op is nearer, cheaper and has a wider choice of groceries.

129. The TAA acknowledges in Table 2.5 that the closest bus stops exceed the HCC’s highway design guidance statement that “bus stops should be located so that the maximum walking distance from any dwelling is 400m”, with distances of between 780 and 965 metres provided as measurements of distance between the development and the various local bus stops - all estimated to be approximately 9-10 minutes’ walk.
130. The applicant proposes to offer a financial donation to the HCC Transport Team for 5 years in order to upgrade and enhance the frequency of bus route 321 - the key bus route through Chiswell Green village. However, no regard is paid to the fact that the greater the distance to be walked to the bus stop, the less the bus route is likely to be chosen as a preferred route by the residents of the proposed development, and of course, those living on the western side of the development will have further to walk to the bus stops than those living on the eastern boundary. Providing the measurements of distance and a financial contribution to improving the bus frequency will not resolve the implicit difficulties in persuading people to change their choice of transport.
131. Furthermore, the TAA suggests that How Wood and Park Street Stations are within convenient walking or cycling distance, implying that the stations are suitable for commuters. However, both of these are unmanned stations, with no car park or bicycle storage facilities. More pertinently, these stations form part of a limited single-track line that runs an irregular timetable only from St Albans Abbey Station to Watford Junction, taking 18 minutes in total. Anyone wishing to travel to the Abbey Station or into St Albans by public transport would use the bus in preference for speed and convenience. Anyone wishing to go to London is more likely to want to go to St Albans City Station from which fast trains arrive at Kings Cross/St Pancras in approximately 20 minutes.

Abbey Line Map



132. Additionally, travelling to these stations via cycle or on foot is dangerous as the route from Chiswell Green to How Wood and to Park Street requires pedestrians and cyclists to cross the A405 dual carriageway. Usage of the stations at How Wood or Park Street is therefore highly unlikely, and travel via St Albans City Station promotes car usage as this is the fastest and most effective way to reach the City Station, with the attendant increase in both congestion and pollution in the city centre
133. Finally, the TAA suggests that children from the proposed development would walk to Killigrew Primary School (9). A number of children from the local area do walk to Killigrew primary school, however, the reality is that a large number of parents drive their children to school. A survey conducted by the Board of Governors at Margaret Wix Primary School in St Albans in 2014 discovered that parents drove their children to school for a number of reasons, but in a large number of cases, this was either because their children were at different schools and there was insufficient time to walk to both with similar start and finish times, or the distance was unsuitable. Additionally, many parents needed to continue on to work after dropping their children off at school and did not have time to also walk home to collect their car before going on to work. These factors are just as relevant today, if not more so, Therefore, opportunities to walk or cycle to a primary school will not produce the extent of the predicted reduction in car usage, especially as the children from this proposed development would most likely be attending Killigrew, Prae Wood or How Wood Schools. Many children will be attending secondary schools which are not within walking distance.

Low rates of pedestrian travel

134. The TAA paragraph 2.25 and Figure 3 offer 'evidence' from the National Travel Survey undertaken in 2019 which appears to show that the majority (80%) of journeys of under 1 mile (1.6km) are undertaken on foot, with a further circa 30% taken on foot for journeys of under 2 miles (1.6 - 3.2km), with the applicant suggesting that a near full range of amenities would be available to residents of the proposed development within a 2 mile - i.e. walking distance - of the site.
135. KCG rejects the survey results as being representative of Chiswell Green as the results are averages of national data taken from a combination of city centre and countryside settings. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that built up areas such as town centres have much higher levels of pedestrian behaviour, whereas the rural setting of villages and small towns, with their more limited facilities and greater distances, will have much lower levels. Chiswell Green, and particularly the application site, is a semi-rural setting and the pedestrian opportunities which might be found in a town or city setting do not apply to this location.
136. Furthermore, the Southern St Albans Urban Transport Plan of 2009 (p9 paragraph 2.11) found that Hertfordshire has the 4th highest level of car ownership in England, with 41% of households having access to 2 or more cars. This report dates from 13 years ago so this is likely to be an under-estimation of modern car ownership in this semi-rural setting.

137. It is therefore not logical to assume that the National Travel Survey results of 2019 reflect the area around the application site. Many residents of Chiswell Green have chosen this setting for its easy access to main arterial transport links and the wider road network from which they benefit by use of a motorised vehicle. Just because a destination is within walking distance does not mean that residents will walk.

Flaws in proposals to shift behaviour towards bicycle travel

138. The applicant, via the Transport Assessment Addendum, makes a valiant attempt to offer mechanisms by which a shift away from vehicle transport towards walking and cycling could be achieved. However, there are some fundamental impediments to this being successful.

139. TAA paragraphs 2.27 to 2.49 and Figures 4 to 12, highlight numerous cycling routes which the applicant suggests, with some raising of awareness, improved road markings etc, would see residents of the proposed development choosing to cycle, rather than drive. By looking at the colourful maps included in the TAA showing the various routes, it appears that the cycling routes are plentiful, varied and viable. KCG is supportive of any improvements to cycle facilities, however, a physical knowledge of these routes immediately quashes any concept that these routes could become the preferred choice.

140. St Albans is built on hilly terrain, which immediately presents a challenge to cyclists, in particular those cycling as a mode of transport, as opposed to leisure cyclists who may welcome the variety of the terrain. On the main route into St Albans, St Stephen's Hill is a long, dark, narrow hill with a downward gradient of 8.3%, overhanging trees and bushes, and no footpath on one side. This follows into Holywell Hill with its long, upward gradient of 9%, steep enough that it has been used by skiers on snowy evenings in living memory for some impromptu practice. It is also listed on the Strava website (a company that supports athletes to achieve their best) as a "hill climb challenge" which has been attempted 5,142 times by 1,276 people. This is not suitable for regular commuting.

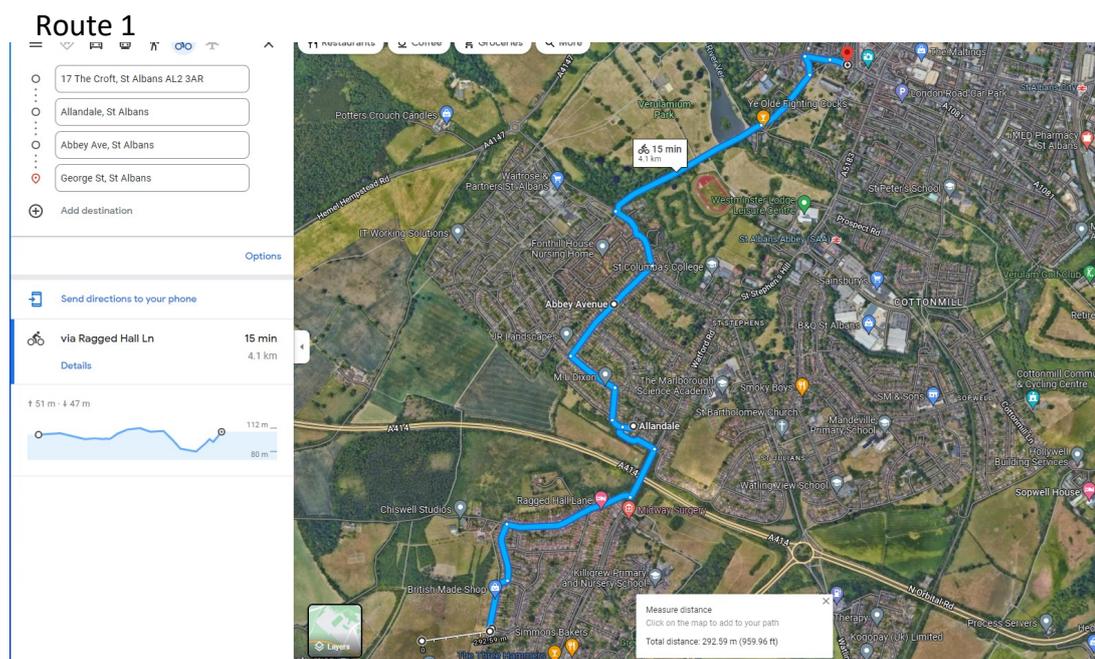


St Stephen's Hill 8.3% gradient © 2022 Google



Holywell Hill – 9% gradient ©Tripadvisor

141. If these routes are unsuitable for regular commuting, alternative routes exist, but the essence still remains - St Albans is built on very hilly ground, ultimately leading to the centre of St Albans at the top of a significant hill, and any alternative routes will still have to accommodate this change in elevation. Crossfields, Verulamium Park (as pictured in the TAA Figure 8) , Romeland, George Street, Robert Avenue, Wilshire Avenue, amongst many others are very steep and would require cyclists to dismount in the uphill direction.
142. Many of the routes described as “quiet”, including Robert Avenue, Watling Street, The Alban Way and Verulamium Park, are dangerous, either through the speed, volume or proximity of passing traffic on the route, obstacles, or because the routes are screened from wider public view and are a risk to personal safety due to anti-social behaviour in these areas. This is particularly true of the Alban Way, which is avoided by many local residents, and Verulamium Park, where there are regular incidences of random violence and gangs with knives roam regularly, even during daylight hours.
143. These “quiet” routes also require interaction with busy junctions such as roundabouts, and obstacles such as buses stopping or parked cars, traffic lights and pedestrian crossings. The proposal for cyclists to use Watford Road Minor (the service roads parallel with the main road) could also be dangerous for cyclists travelling at speed with householders reversing their cars out of their drives with little chance to see a cyclist amongst the many parked vehicles on these service roads.
144. In combination, the difficulty of the terrain and the danger along some routes, will inevitably deter some residents from cycling. Realistically, the British weather cannot be exempt from consideration as many will choose not to cycle in rain or icy conditions, and the best of intentions will fade in the winter months.



Restaurants Coffee Groceries More

17 The Croft, St Albans AL2 3AR

Robert Ave, St Albans

Vesta Ave, St Albans

Tavistock Ave, St Albans

Abbots Ave W, St Albans

Berners Dr, St Albans

Griffiths Way, St Albans

Add destination

Options

Send directions to your phone

via Ragged Hall Ln and Robert Ave 14 min
4.1 km

Details

110 m - 32 m

105 m
80 m

Google

Route 2

17 The Croft, St Albans AL2 3AR

Robert Ave, St Albans

Vesta Ave, St Albans

Tavistock Ave, St Albans

Abbots Ave W, St Albans

Berners Dr, St Albans

St Albans City, St Albans AL1 5HE

Add destination

Options

Send directions to your phone

via Ragged Hall Ln and Robert Ave 20 min
5.4 km

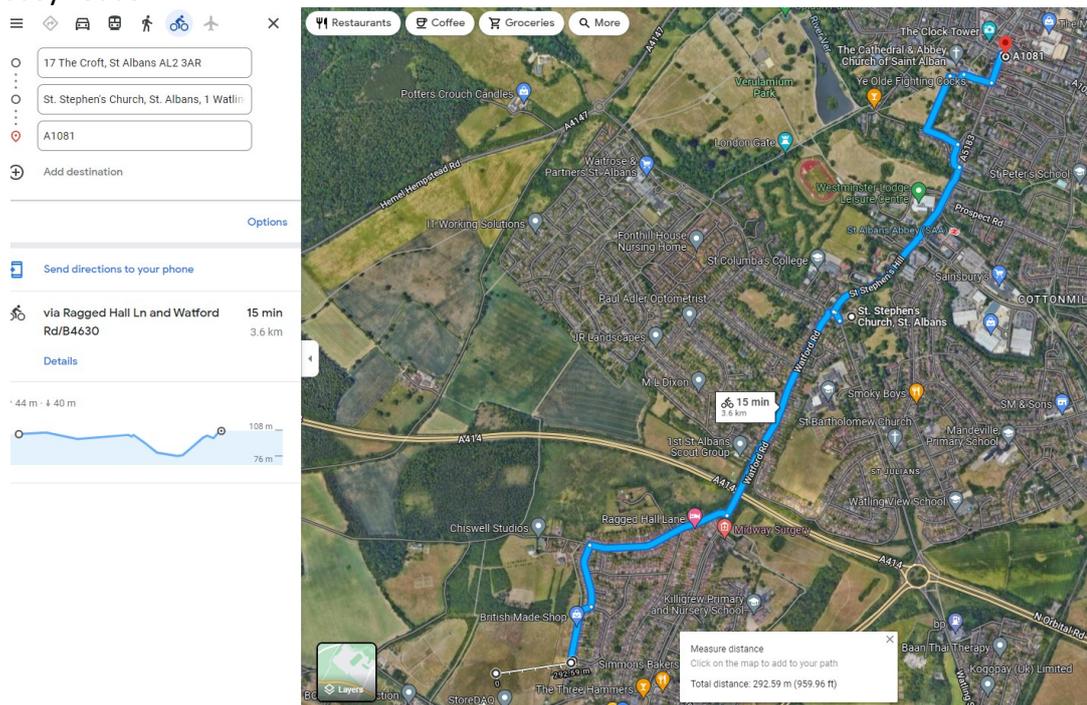
Details

134 m - 37 m

105 m
76 m

Google

Route 3 - Direct to Town Centre - Unrealistic for most people due to steep hills and busy roads.



145. In order to encourage the residents of the proposed development to change their transport habits, the applicant is offering to supply one electric bike per property with the initial purchase of each new property (TAA paragraph 2.61). This would appear to be a constructive proposal, however, on closer inspection, it is rather flawed. One electric bike per unit does not fulfil the transport requirements of each member of the household, and other members of the household would either have to purchase their own bike (TAA Table 2.7 estimates the cost at £800 per bike), or use alternative means of transport. If the alternative chosen is a private vehicle, and the direction of travel is similar, the user of the electric bike may also opt to travel by private vehicle, leaving the electric bike unused. Destination parking for these 330 electric bikes would also need to be considered, as would safety, repairs, weight and theft.
146. The most significant flaw in this scheme is the ownership of the bike; it would not be workable for householders to be prevented from selling the bikes or to be obliged to pass them on with the ownership of the house. Policing any restrictions would also be unworkable. Therefore, this is a transient measure at best, and may be short-lived if the E-bikes are promptly sold or the properties turn over in short timeframes. Equally, repair costs may become inhibitive to their use, and replacement costs may also be prohibitive if replacement were to become necessary through age or damage. This scheme is not therefore sustainable.

Developer infrastructure contributions

147. In response to detail requested in HCC's initial response to the scheme, the TAA sets out the various financial contributions the applicant would offer if the scheme were to be accepted (paragraphs 2.70 to 2.72 and Tables 2.6 and 2.7):
- i) £970, 000 for off-site highway infrastructure works and associated costs
 - ii) £1,309,210 for residential travel plan measures and associated costs
148. However, these contributions are misleading; the cost estimate for off-site highway infrastructure works includes 20% for any assumptions regarding pre-planning preliminaries and 50% for contingencies. The contribution to off-site infrastructure works could therefore be as little as £291,000 – one third of the outlined contribution.
149. The contribution for the residential travel plan measures includes £264,000 for the provision of an E-bike to each first new household, broken down as £800 per bike. However, it is highly likely that a supplier would offer a significant discount for the bulk purchase of 330 new E-bikes, and as detailed in paragraphs 146 and 147 above, the scheme to provide one E-bike per first household per unit on the development is flawed.
150. The contribution also includes the provision of 1 free 4-week bus ticket to each new household. Again, KCG suggests that this proposal is lacking; whilst the proposal is well-intentioned, it assumes that bus travel is viable for at least one person per household, which in itself is questionable. It also assumes that 4 weeks is enough to change habitual behaviour. The Department of Transport's Enabling Behaviour Change Information Pack sets out the areas in which change is required in order to change behaviour - structure, attitudes and habits:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/4469/enabling-behaviour-change-info-pack.pdf
151. The DoT defines "structure" as the limitations within which any individual is operating which are beyond their control - frequency or routes of bus services, or compatibility of bus timetables with working hours, for example. This is particularly pertinent to key workers who are unlikely to be working in the Chiswell Green area, and may not be able to avail of bus services, depending on their place of work and their working patterns.
152. Attitudes include perceptions such as it being generally considered unsafe to travel alone on public transport at certain times, especially late in the evening. This is a material consideration for female key workers - potentially 50% of the new residents. The Covid-19 pandemic has also affected the perception of safety of travel by public transport with the increased risk to health of infection.

153. Personal preferences, time pressures, a desire for privacy or peace, or physical impediments or disabilities all influence habitual behaviour, as do the time of year and the weather.
154. Overall, the 4-week bus ticket is well-intentioned, but is highly unlikely to produce a permanent change in transport behaviour in favour of public buses. The proposed development is being designed for key workers, for whom there are few local work opportunities, who work long and unsociable working hours, including shift work, and whose working hours may be very physically demanding. All these factors will also sway preferences towards car usage. It would be unlikely that a nurse finishing a 14-hour shift at Watford General at 9pm on a Sunday evening would choose to return home via public transport if car transport was an option.

Summary of transport and highways response

155. In summary, KCG accepts that the applicant has tried to create options to comply with NPPF (July 2021) Paragraph 111, but believes that the suggestions will be unworkable and unsustainable. KCG is far from convinced that the applicant has provided an adequate response to the concerns raised by HCC Highways and the draft report of the planning case officer to the Planning Referrals Committee. In particular, KCG expects that the proposals to minimise the impact of the imposition of a huge quantity of vehicular traffic on the local area of Chiswell Green will have very little effect. KCG believes that these proposals will result in a minimal change to the travel behaviour of the residents of the proposed development, and the Addendum to the Transport Assessment fails to consider the significant impact of the proposed development on the wider highways network.
156. KCG believes that the objections raised by HCC in their February 2022 response to the application will not be overcome by the proposed strategies and is very concerned that HCC seems persuaded by the marketing spin around creating a permanent change in travel behaviour, and has since withdrawn their objection to the development.
157. Additionally, the problems highlighted above with regard to the impact of the proposed Polo Field development would be exacerbated if both the Polo Field and the Cala Homes applications were to be approved. KCG believes there will be a huge cumulative impact in terms of operational capacity of the surrounding transport network and that the cumulative effect therefore needs to be fully considered in the determination of both applications.

Comments on the Applicant's Further Information

158. KCG has given careful consideration to the further representations made to the Council following the withdrawal of the application from the Planning Referrals Committee on 28th March 2022. Particular attention has been paid to the Opinion by Paul Stinchcombe QC, dated 11th February 2022, on the internal consultation response made to St Albans City and District Council by its Spatial Planning team with regards to the planning application. This was posted on the Council website on 14th April, together with a full rebuttal by the applicant of the officer report which had been withdrawn from the Referrals Committee. Both were sent to all members of the Council.
159. The rebuttal contained a misinterpretation of the Council officers' views on affordable housing, which allegedly contained opposition to key worker housing. Based on the Opinion of the QC, the rebuttal stated that the officers had unlawfully relied on the SKM Green belt Review and the withdrawn Local Plan. It was concluded that no weight should be placed on the Planning Balance section of the officer report and its recommendations.
160. As acknowledged by the applicant and Learned Counsel, there is no categorisation of the types of affordable housing in the NPPF or in Planning Practice Guidance. This is an unusual application as it proposes to cater for 100% affordable units. This includes "military personnel", which are not specifically mentioned in government policies. There is no reference to any specific occupations or allocations of land. The officer was unfairly criticised for not quoting policy when stating his position, which was a matter of judgement based on the information submitted with the application.
161. Regrettably, the focus of the rebuttal on affordable housing has diverted the attention away from the real issues which are the potential harm to the Green Belt and the lack of exceptional circumstances which could outweigh the harm. The officer's report concentrated reasonably on the potential harm to the Green Belt which could result from the proposed development. In the determination of this application, the key consideration is the effect that housing development, irrespective of its type, would have on the Green Belt and the lack of exceptional circumstances to outweigh the obvious harm.
162. In addition, HCC Strategic Housing Department is in agreement with KCG and the vast majority of local residents in failing to believe that the proposed development would provide housing that will be genuinely affordable to key workers in an area of such high house prices, nor that there is any demand from key workers for such a large development. The Strategic Housing Department also points out that this development does not contribute to the demand for affordable rented properties.
163. KCG notes the statement by the applicant's Learned Counsel that the planning officer had unlawfully relied on the SKM Green Belt Review and now withdrawn Local Plan, but asserts that, pending the production of a Local Plan, the recently 'made' SSNP is now the key basis for decision making.

Health, Facilities and Services

164. Reflecting the sincere and widespread concerns of the local community, KCG thinks it pertinent to also comment on the availability of existing facilities and services in the area which would be expected to serve the new residents of the proposed development. In particular, KCG highlights that the only surgery nearby, Midway Surgery, which also serves residents outside the Chiswell Green area, is operating in a building that is only two thirds of the size necessary for its current patient numbers. This impacts the number of doctors, nurses and support staff it can house, and therefore the service it can offer. Local residents experience wait times of 50 minutes daily in the telephone booking system to request an appointment with a medical practitioner for that day. Pre-bookable appointments are only available 14 days forward and these are also booked within minutes of their release. Administration staff admit that the surgery is operating well beyond capacity and is struggling to offer its service. Although there are proposals in the pipeline to enlarge the surgery building, this enlargement is necessary in order to be able to provide the expected service to its existing register of patients. Further enlargement is constrained by the size of the site and the availability of parking, with the current expansion plans already requiring the acquisition of more space in order to make the expansion possible. This surgery could not accommodate any increase in patient demand from any new developments, even with an increase in funding.
165. KCG also highlights that the only dental surgery in Chiswell Green is a specialist dental practice specialising in surgical procedures; it does not offer regular family dentistry. Residents must therefore travel significant distances, usually by car, in order to access dental services. Additionally, the availability of registration for NHS treatment numbers is single digits at any time across the whole of the St Albans area, if there is any at all.
166. The East of England Ambulance Service, in their response to the application in January 2022, stated that *“EEAST does not have the capacity to meet the additional growth resulting from this development and cumulative development growth in the area”*. This is supported by anecdotal evidence from local residents who work as “first responders” who report regularly being asked to stay with those waiting for an ambulance for prolonged periods of time.
167. With the ever-surging demand for modern facilities, residents of Chiswell Green have begun to experience power cuts on a regular basis, as well as reductions in quality of internet supply, even from fibre-to-the-house supplies. There is considerable concern amongst residents of Chiswell Green that additional demands on the clearly limited supplies of power and internet will only cause a deterioration in the service, affecting the quality of life for all local residents.

168. A noise assessment was conducted on behalf of the applicant and concluded that the levels of noise in the area of the application site exceeded the level at which it would be acceptable to sleep with windows open. Society has started to understand the negative impact of noise pollution on our well-being, and while the high temperatures of this summer are still a vivid memory and with predictions that summer temperatures such as those experienced recently will be regularly experienced in future, a development in which open windows at night would prevent sleep must raise serious concerns about the location of the site.
169. The source of the noise pollution at the application site mentioned above stems from the site's position close to the M1, M25 and A414 main arterial routes. Hertfordshire Public Health recommends that all developments submit a Health Impact Assessment which does not appear to have been carried out for the Polo Field development. In particular, an HIA examines the impact of air pollution on human health due to the association of ambient air pollution with health effects such as mortality, respiratory and cardiovascular hospitalisations, change in lung function and asthma attacks, as lower standards of air quality have been proven to be a public health risk. Given the location of Chiswell Green, surrounded by the key arterial routes of M25, A414 and M1, and conscious of the extent of air pollution created by traffic on these roads, any possibility of large increases in traffic and therefore in air pollution in the area should be considered very seriously.
170. Furthermore, the critical measure of air quality is not the measure at the site prior to construction, but the impact on air quality at the site once the construction of the development is completed, factoring in any reduction in contribution to air quality from the destruction of green areas and the pollution from the buildings once they are being lived in. This measurement also needs to include the vehicles that will be associated with the development as well as other reductions in air quality which result from human habitation.

Summary and conclusions

171. In summary, KCG objects in the strongest terms to this application, and supports the findings of the case planning officer that this development is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt where development is not permitted, except in very special circumstances.
172. KCG has not been persuaded by the applicant's submission that the development justifies an exception being made, and KCG firmly asserts that no special circumstances exist with regard to this development.
173. KCG supports the recently 'made' St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan which clearly places the application site outside the built-up area boundary. Examination of local sites in preparation for the SSNP has, at no point, considered the application site as a potential site for development.

174. Preparation for the new Local Plan is underway with sites put forward under the Council's "call for sites" being assessed according to set criteria. Until this review is complete, all nominated sites carry equal weighting. The application site therefore has no rationale to be considered for development prior to the production of the new Local Plan.
175. On this basis, the proposed development is contrary to Policy 1 of the St Albans Local Plan Review 1994 and to the NPPF, and is not supported by the SSNP for development.
176. This development would cause significant harm to the local area and to its existing population. The visual amenity and intrinsic character and beauty of the Green Belt would be harmed, as would its openness and the rural character of the area to the west of Chiswell Green.
177. The Transport Statement and its Addendum have failed to provide adequate measures to attenuate the effect of the additional traffic that would arise from the proposed development. The proposal is therefore contrary to paragraphs 110-112 of the NPPF and Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP4).
178. The Ecological Assessment does not include a metric to quantify current levels of biodiversity, which have been grossly underestimated by the applicant, and the application therefore cannot provide adequate information to show that a net increase in biodiversity could be achieved. The application does not therefore comply with the provisions of the Environment Act 2021 and BS4020.
179. In this sensitive historical setting, the applicant has failed to submit either a Heritage Statement or an Archaeological Impact Statement, and is therefore in contravention of NPPF Policy 194 and St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994 Policy 111.
180. To conclude, much to the frustration of some developers and landowners, it is widely understood that the Green Belt has been designated for its own protection, and the myriad attempts across the country to turn vast swathes of green land into concrete jungles demonstrate how insightful our forefathers were in recognising that the land needed to be protected.
181. In this application, we see another attempt to overturn the protections accorded to the Green Belt, in this case under the guise of a philanthropic gesture to the key workers who were vaunted during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. KCG agrees that key workers deserve recognition for their dedication and altruism, KCG agrees that key workers perform under-valued and important roles in society, KCG agrees that it is difficult for key workers to afford their own homes in St Albans, but KCG does not agree that there is a sufficient need or demand from at least 330 of these key workers to destroy nearly 15 hectares of precious Green Belt in Chiswell Green.

182. The applicant recognises that any development in the Green Belt is, per se, harmful. However, the applicant asserts that the benefit of providing 330 dwellings for key workers would outweigh the harm that would be caused to the openness of the Green Belt and to the rural character of the area to the west of Chiswell Green. The applicant also asserts that the provision of housing for key workers supercedes the value of providing affordable housing in general, and therefore maintains that the provision of housing for key workers satisfies the concept of 'very special circumstances', thus justifying development in the Green Belt.
183. However, the fundamental issues still remain; the application site emphatically satisfies all five purposes of the Green Belt, and those who live in the local area, wedged in the middle of the heavily polluting M25, M1 and A414 triangle, depend on this area of Green Belt to give some protection to their health and well-being from the harms that might otherwise result. Additionally, the Green Belt has a significant role to play in mitigating climate change, and it provides opportunities for sport, leisure and relaxation, as well as nurturing the bio-diversity that underpins the continuation of human existence on earth.
184. KCG concurs with the applicant that the withdrawn 2018 Local Plan and the supporting SKM Green Belt Review are immaterial in current decision-making, but asserts that, until a new Local Plan is produced, the "saved policies" from the St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994, the NPPF and the recently "made" St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan now form the basis for planning decisions in St Stephen Parish.
185. A growing call for outdated government-imposed housing targets to be recalculated could realistically result in a major reduction in the local housing target in the near future, a target which, according to MP Daisy Cooper and Leader of the Council Chris White, could be largely satisfied by using brownfield sites. The appropriate channels for allocating sites for development are through the review process already underway in preparation for the production of a new Local Plan. This review will consider the wider context of sites and need, and form the basis for an impartial and measured mechanism for granting development approvals in the future. In the meantime, housing for key workers as a distinct group has no place in planning targets and, despite domineering opinions to support the applicant, therefore garners no leverage in any attempt to claim that special circumstances exist to justify the destruction of the Green Belt.
186. This development would cause significant harm to the local area and its population; a consequential increase in health-damaging pollution, damage to the historic setting of the city centre, the loss of facilities for use by the local and wider population, a reduction in local biodiversity, and critically, a significant cumulative impact on highway safety and on the operational capacity of the surrounding transport network from a 30% increase in population.

187. The facts of the application are clear; irrefutable damage will be done to the Green Belt if the development is to proceed, and no special circumstances exist to justify the destruction of the Green Belt. The impact of the development on the existing village of Chiswell Green will be demonstrably injurious, and, despite the valiant efforts of the applicant to model otherwise, the suggested proposals to mitigate the damage caused by the resultant increase in vehicular traffic will not create the long-term sustainable changes in travel behaviours desired by the planning authorities.
188. Finally, on behalf of the fire-fighters, nurses, teachers, train drivers, doctors, carers, police officers, bank workers, plumbers all living and owning homes in Chiswell Green who have made their opposition to the application clear to KCG, and for the remainder of the 98% of residents of Chiswell Green who equally oppose this application, KCG respectfully reminds the Council that a decision in favour of this application is a vote for the destruction of the Green Belt - a decision that is not just final, but fatal. In the words of the CPRE, "Countryside, not concrete".

Please Keep Chiswell **Green**.

Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPI
Hertford

Keep Chiswell **Green**
Chiswell Green

30th August 2022

Appendix 1

Chiswell Green Traffic Speed and Volume Records summary from HCC

Figures quoted are in vehicles per hour over a 16-hour day

<u>Location</u>	<u>Average/ hour</u>	<u>AM peak</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>PM peak</u>	<u>Time</u>
Watford Rd at Driftwood Ave Northbound	462	583	08:00	724	17:00
Watford Rd at Driftwood Ave Southbound	424	508	09:00	574	17:00
Watford Rd at Stanmount Rd Southbound	455	670	11:00	550	16:00
Watford Rd at Stanmount Rd Northbound	404	561	11:00	601	12:00
A405 Burston Nurseries Northeast bound	1,324	1,436	08:00	1,722	18:00
A405 Burston Nurseries Southwest bound	1,344	1,768	06:00	1,586	15:00
Stanley Avenue Northbound	30	44	08:00	47	16:00
Stanley Avenue Southbound	29	39	11:00	36	16:00