



## **Gateway development**

### **Proof of Evidence**

by

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### **Public Inquiry**

PINS Ref : APP/B1930/W/22/3313110

and APP/B1930/W/22/3312277

LPA Ref : 5/2022/0927 and 5/2021/3194



## 1.0 Bio

- 1.1 I am Shirani St Ledger McCarthy and I have lived in Chiswell Green for 28 years. I initially commuted into London to work, then stayed at home with my children, both of whom have been schooled locally.
- 1.2 I have a BA (Hons) in Management Studies with French, and was a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development for 18 years until I retired through ill-health. I also held the ACI Financial Markets Association Dealing Certificate and worked as a sales trader for a European investment bank. However, most of my career was in Human Resources and Consulting, in which capacity I worked in a broad range of sectors.
- 1.3 I was encouraged by my neighbours to join the newly formed Keep Chiswell Green in March 2022 when Cala Homes launched its public consultation on their proposed development South of Chiswell Green Lane, which caused us to realise how extensive was the threat to the Green Belt in Chiswell Green.

## 2.0 Introduction

2.1 We have all heard the mantra that “every planning application is different and must be decided on its own merits”. However, we also hear that “applications must be decided with consistency” and that decisions made with regard to one application have implications for other applications where circumstances are similar.

2.2 As we have seen from Colney Heath, a decision made about one parcel of land – whether that is to grant or to refuse building permission – can then be seen, particularly by those to whom it would be favourable, to set a precedent, not just for the surrounding parcels of land, such as in Colney Heath, but more widely, even across the country.

2.3 The applications being determined by this appeal will, in their turn, be used to claim precedent for the applications that follow them. However, for these applications in Chiswell Green, we already know there is significant potential for a domino-effect and that the local Green Belt will come under intense pressure.

2.4 Under the local council’s Call for Sites in 2021 in preparation for the emerging Local Plan, 200 sites, including brownfield sites, were put forward for assessment. They joined 182 other sites that had been nominated under previous calls for sites to start the process to determine which sites might be included for development in the next Local Plan.

### 3.0 Call for Sites – Chiswell Green

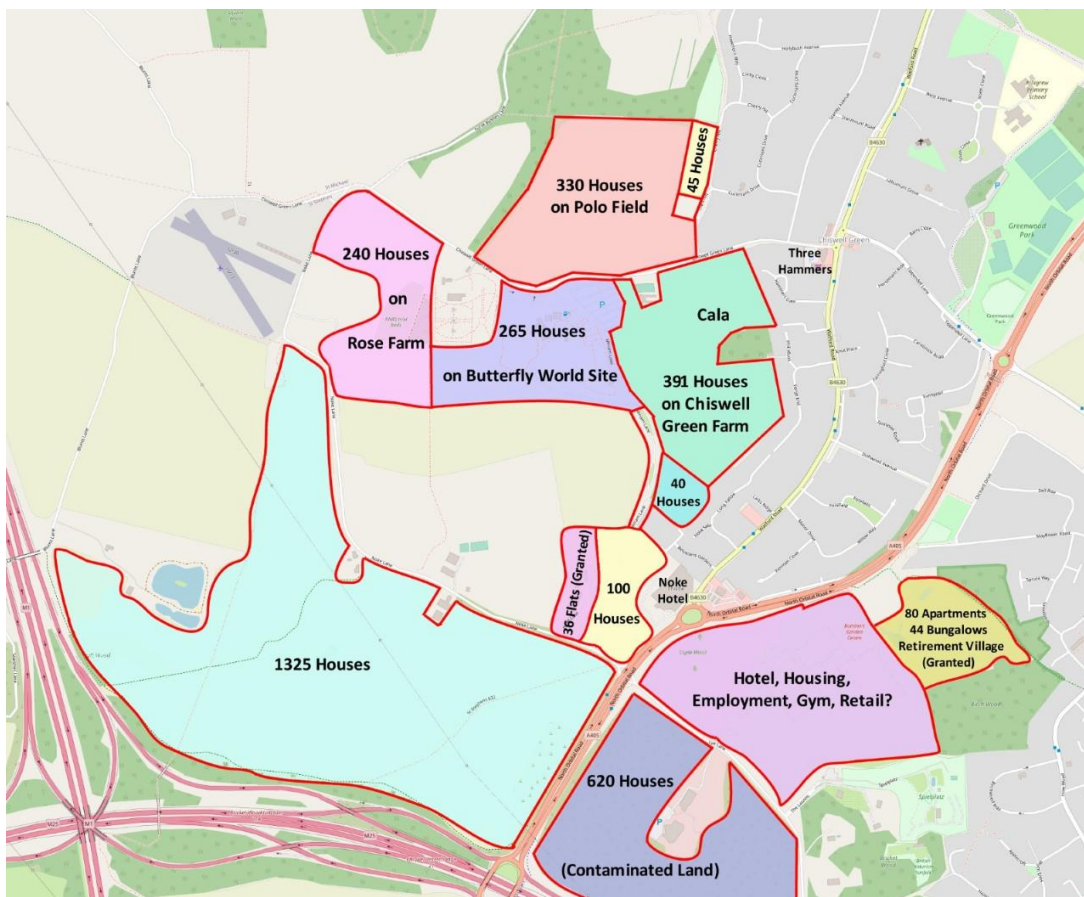


Figure 1 (CD 6.30)

Graphic by KCG



- 3.1 In Figure 1 above, we can see the village of Chiswell Green, and the two application sites, labelled "Cala" (in green) and the "Polo Field" (in red to the north).
- 3.2 In addition, we can see the other sites which have been put forward in this area. To the far right of the image, in yellow, we see the Retirement Village at Burston Garden Centre on which construction is about to start.
- 3.3 To the southwest of the Retirement Village, the plot is labelled for a hotel, with housing, employment, a gym and retail. However, a presentation has just been made to the Parish Council by developers at the start of their application process for this site. The application will now be for 100 houses.
- 3.4 To the south again is a plot marked for 620 houses; given that the land here is contaminated, hopefully this will come to nothing. On the opposite side of the dual carriageway, on the edge of the M25, is a plot which was previously considered for a new hospital or even a football stadium. However, both of these options were dismissed and it is said to be able to accommodate 1,325 houses.



3.5 As we look north, we see the parcel within which sits the South site. Beside it is the old Butterfly World site, curling around the Royal Entomological Society and what is left of the Royal National Rose Society and Gardens. Currently the site of unlawful activity (CD 6.31), and subject to enforcement action (CD 6.32.1, CD 6.32.2), the landowner proposes that it is suitable for 265 houses. To the north of the Grade II listed farmhouse of Little Daneswick with Noke Farm in the centre of the plot is the site of Rose Farm, also hosting unlawful activity in the form of Boom Construction. This site is said to be suitable for a further 240 houses.



(CD 6.34) Boom Construction, Rose Farm

Google Earth



- 3.6 We see just around the Noke Hotel some smaller parcels - 100 houses, 40 houses, 36 that have already been granted. And to the north of the image, tucked into the Polo Field is a site which has been put forward in the past for 5-bedroomed houses, a traveller site, and now 45 houses.
- 3.7 Adding up the houses proposed in this northern section, we get 1,447. That's exactly 100 houses more than the village currently comprises.
- 3.8 If we were to add in the other sites, 80 at Burston Nurseries, 100 just south, 1,325 by M25, we get another 1,505. So to add all of these together, we're looking at a whopping 2,952 - a new house for every man, woman and child currently living in Chiswell Green.
- 3.9 Of course, we don't imagine that all of these sites will progress all the way through the Local Plan process, but the Local Plan is still some years away from being finalised and adopted. And landowners know this. While St Albans still does not have a Local Plan, developers are free to apply for permission to build, with some chance that they may be successful.





#### **4.0 Gateway development**

- 4.1 So we come back to “each application on its own merits”, and “consistency in the decision making process”.
- 4.2 There is little doubt that if the North site were to be granted permission to develop, it would not be long before we could expect to see an application for the adjacent plot, squeezed in between the previous urban settlement boundary and the proposed North site development. In fact, this strip of land has been the subject of various applications in the past. The impact of a grant of permission to the North site appellant would be to change the Green Belt boundary and result in a de facto permission for a second site to be developed in addition.
- 4.3 Likewise, if the South site were to be granted permission, we could be nearly certain that those who are permitting unlawful industrial activities to take place at the Butterfly World and Rose Farm sites would be keen to test a grant of permission for their sites too, encouraged maybe by the fact that, while their sites are also in the Metropolitan Green Belt, the sites have been damaged by their unlawful occupation.





(CD 6.33) Unlawful activity at Butterfly World

*Photo KCG*

4.4 To extrapolate further, if these sites – Cala, the Butterfly World and Rose Farm - were all to be granted permission, there would be very little to stop this whole parcel of land becoming housing.

## 5.0 Strong urban boundary

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5.1 The Appellants for the South site tell us that their proposals will give us a strong boundary with the Green Belt, one that will be permanent, long term and enduring as required by the NPPF at paragraph 140. But the urban boundary along the western edge of Chiswell Green has proven that it already is a strong boundary. This is the same boundary that existed when the Green Belt was established in 1955, and it follows the path that was established by

the people who had travelled between St Albans and Watford over the previous centuries, with houses springing up alongside the route.

5.2 This is Chiswell Green in 1950 and now :

(CD 6.5.3) : *Video Chiswell Green Past and Present (20 secs)*

5.3.1 And this is our urban settlement boundary :



(CD 6.31) Long Fellow

*Photo by KCG*



(CD 6.30.1) Forge End

*Photo by KCG*





(CD 5.30.2) Hammersgate

*Photo by KCG*



(CD 6.30.3) Cherry Hill

*Photo by KCG*

## 6.0 Conclusions

6.1 In terms of the purposes of the Green Belt, the Green Belt at Chiswell Green has been performing the checks and balances for which it was designed - checking unrestricted sprawl and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. On the basis



that each part of the Green Belt plays its part, it has also been contributing to preventing the merging of neighbouring towns.

6.2 Keep Chiswell Green believes that permitting the release of even one part of the Green Belt in this location will cause a cascade of developer-led consequences which will result in the destruction of 250 acres of beautiful Green Belt which currently offers benefits to so many.

6.3 The landowners of these parcels of land have already declared their intentions by offering their land in the call for sites. A grant of permission to either of the appellant sites would act as a “gateway” to further applicants, all of whom could expect to be treated “consistently” with other applications already determined. Before a new Local Plan could be adopted, Chiswell Green could easily see the addition of a further 1,000 houses, all at the expense of the Metropolitan Green Belt.