

Appeal reference: APP/P1615/A/14/2218921

Submission by CPRE Gloucestershire (Forest of Dean District) to the inquiry into an appeal by Allaston Developments Ltd re. land at Driffield Road Lydney

1. CPRE (Forest of Dean District) submitted representations to the Forest of Dean District Council urging refusal of application P1284/13/OUT. The planning authority subsequently refused the application and the applicants have appealed against the decision.
2. CPRE has recently heard that the planning authority has decided not to defend its refusal of planning permission and that was confirmed by an email with attached position statement sent to PINS by the District Council on 20 October. In summary it appears that the planning authority has taken its decision in the light of recent appeal decisions, in particular the weight being given to a 5 year housing land supply as assessed against relevant policies in the Forest of Dean District Core Strategy and other elements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
3. Whilst CPRE recognises the District Council's dilemma it is dismayed at the potential consequences. This makes a mockery of the process of orderly local land use planning, the importance the government has said that it places on a plan-led system and the concept of 'localism'.
4. In its position statement the planning authority has stated that 3 of the 4 reasons given for refusal have been, or can be, overcome by appropriate conditions, s106 agreements or planning obligations. With regard to reason 01 it has re-considered the balance of benefits of the development against the environmental constraints in the light of paragraph 14 of the NPPF and recent appeal decisions. The conclusion reached by the planning authority is that the constraints do not justify refusing the development given the 'onerous requirements' of the NPPF.
5. In his report to the planning committee the planning officer noted the value of the site on landscape and public access to open space grounds. There are panoramic views across the Severn estuary from several footpaths, which appear to be well used.
6. The planning officer's report states '*Although the need for additional land for housing is not agreed, even if it were the site proposed is not well located, its development would result in harm to the landscape and there are more sustainable alternatives*'. It is also acknowledged (and part of refusal reason 01) that the land is mainly grade 3a, 'best and most versatile' agricultural quality, to which paragraph 112 of the NPPF applies.
7. CPRE acknowledges that planning decisions are a matter of balancing often conflicting factors. **However, if the planning officer's report was valid when written – and CPRE believes it was – then the arguments that the site does not provide a 'sustainable' development option remain valid now.**

8. There is a substantial risk that if this site is given consent (probably together with other speculative applications) and the land already allocated for housing in the Core Strategy is subsequently developed, the result will be an excess of housing in Lydney in relation to 'sustainability' criteria. There is already evidence of severe traffic congestion in Chepstow and on the western approach to Gloucester (despite the A40 improvements) as a consequence of out-commuting from housing in the Forest of Dean, which is not matched by sufficient, suitable local employment opportunities.
9. CPRE trusts that the inspector will weigh the arguments against development of this site very carefully and not follow the line which the planning authority has, albeit reluctantly, adopted, of treating the questionmarks over the current housing land supply as overriding the substantial reasons for refusing the development.

23 October 2014