

SAVE PINCENTS HILL ACTION GROUP

21st November 2014

Open letter by email to the Councillors of the Planning Policy Task Group from the combined Save Calcot Action Group and The Save Pincents Hill Group of key planning reasons why this site should be rejected for the DPD:

Dear Councillor,

Re: **Opposition to Turnhams Farm/ Pincents Hill EUA007**

1. This is primarily a countryside site.

The previous application by Blue Living was criticised by CABE, (the Governments own architectural body) as they said it has failed to take into account the topography of the site and that the development will not integrate into the surrounding area. This comment would be true of any development as the site is virtually land locked. Any development would have an adverse effect on the AONB from height levels and light pollution. A photograph is enclosed showing that even as it the land level is clearly about that of the AONB with even a single storey with a pitched roof would clearly be raised above the AONB.

- 1.1 No piling should be allowed as the area is basically clay over chalk. If piling occurred it could well release acid into the underground water.
- 1.2 This site is listed as Flood Plain 1. The run off from Pincents Hill lifted the manhole covers in the Bath Road causing considerable risk to motorists. This was from uncovered land. The same thing happened on the A4 just outside of Newbury with a resultant fatality. The risk is considerably raised even by the provision of comprehensive drainage systems. Porsche raised concerns about this issue in their report which was very comprehensive and mirrors our anxieties as to both the transport/highways issues and the increased flood risk.
- 1.3 Thames Water has stated that it cannot provide full pressure water or adequate sewage to new homes on the site without the use of Grampian pumps.
- 1.4 No provision has been made for education or increased health provision for the new residents.
- 1.5 Highways and Transport issues pose considerable challenges for access to the site. Again. CABE actually commented on what they considered as to non integration of any development on this site and also Reading BC also made reference to this issue. Also the fact that until IKEA is opened and the full impact assessment has been submitted to West Berks, highways issues will not

have been resolved by the time of this committee for the DPD. Even the Planning and Trading office recommended refusal of the failed application on these grounds.

- 1.6 This development will not reduce the need for car travel and car parking in the area. The local average of cars per household for the area is approx 1.4. The local area is insufficiently serviced by public transport with the resultant need for the use of cars which will not give a reduction on car travel.

2. The proposed development contravenes the following policies and strategies: PPS3 para 38i on Vision – to maintain the gap between Theale, Calcot and Tilehurst. PPS7 – Local landscape: PPG1 – Protection of the countryside and existing communities PPG2 – land use issues and opportunity to be found in the countryside around all urban areas. Policy NRM5(v) of the South East Plan. the Zone of Visual influence must be taken into consideration in an accurate visual envelope from several viewpoints
 - 2.1 There is a need to preserve the separate identities of Tilehurst, Calcot and Theale, although there is a partial separation from Theale caused by the M4. To lose this gap would cause a serious loss of identity or sense of place. Even in cities, commons and parks form divisions that serve as “breaks” in developments to preserve area distinction.
 - 2.2 Open Spaces Strategy and Core Strategy CS28 (Loss of Open Space) state that open space in areas where it is deficient should be protected, and loss of such open space should be compensated for. There are over 15,000 local inhabitants in the area covered by Tilehurst Parish Council and the suggested open space/recreational area per 1,000 local residents is 6 acres, therefore there should be 90 acres allocated for this use. Unfortunately recreational space for this area is sadly lacking as are amenities and services. We need this space to comply with suggested Government recommendations.
 - 2.3 Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9 (biodiversity), PPG 15 (planning and the historic environment)
 - 2.4 National guidances e.g. BS 5837 (arboricultural), DfT (Transport), PPS 1 (sustainability – this development is not sustainable)

3. Contravention of the Biodiversity Action Plan: - Will the site still be recognised as being of ‘district/county-level importance’ after development?
 - 3.1 The site is home to a number of rare B-BAP and L-BAP protected species including slow worms, bats, badgers, stag beetles, hedgehogs, (in addition to roebuck and muntjac deer, and a variety of bird and butterfly species – list attached) and dormice (there are very few recorded sightings of dormice in Berkshire). Any relocation and/or mitigation measures would be unsatisfactory and any development will cause the decline in this protected wildlife (thereby contravening PPS 9). The area is a mixture of rare heath land, ancient hedgerows, meadows, copses and woodland.

- 3.2 The ‘mosaic of habitats’ would be lost including a substantial area of tree canopy.
 - 3.3 Adverse effect on wildlife link (contrary to Policy CS38).
 - 3.4 Detrimental effect on residents’ visual enjoyment of the Landscape and animals.
 - 3.5 The loss of many Category A trees and ancient hedgerows. There is a considerable number of Tree Preservation Orders on many trees on this site that are of considerable amenity value and their loss should be resisted.
4. Traffic, air quality and noise
 - 4.1 The Bath Road along this stretch is already severely congested at rush hour and buses routes have been cancelled. The TA confirms that the volume of traffic along this road at rush hour is already close to maximum capacity. In spite of the envisaged improvements the surrounding infrastructure cannot cope with another development. It is acknowledged by the powers that be that the M4 from Junction 11 is a problem and will be made into a “smart” motorway doing away with the hard shoulder. Apparently, it is envisaged that there will be another lane added to the roundabout at this junction. However, there could be over 2,000,000 extra cars journeys per year to be added when IKEA opens, admittedly not all coming from the M4, but it is a good bet that the majority will come that way – can the area cope? Why put an IKEA on one of the busiest sections of the motorway and junctions?
 - 4.2 Many residents fear that any development on Turnhams Farm/Pincents Hill would open up a real rat run from the M4, A4, Pincents Hill, City Road, or Little Heath Road to Reading, or beyond to Oxford as a short cut, thereby devastating the area, it would become like an M4a. Little Heath and City Roads during rush hours are frequently gridlocked (see photo attached).
 - 4.3 Reading’s previous decision not to allow any amendments to the current road layout at the junction of School Road and City Road.
 - 4.4 There are ten schools within a mile radius of the proposed development. Three primary schools on the approach roads, and Little Heath School is particularly at risk with the School’s playing fields on the opposite side of the road so students have to cross the road on a regular basis for sports activities.
 5. Further eroding of what appears to be a rare Saxon sunken lane (Pincents Lane) with its ancient hedgerows and in places just a 7/8ft track which forms a softening gradual approach to the AONB (which has a constant water run-off/or underground spring) which in extremely cold weather creates an almost slalom run down its steep curving descent – photograph attached).
 6. Sustainability
This development is not sustainable either from the lack of transport, schooling, health facilities, leisure facilities and non integration into the area .
 7. Heritage and character

The skyline along the ridge could be fundamentally altered by buildings which would dominate and detract from the attractiveness of the Landscape (please see attached photograph showing height of land already above the level of the AONB where the new development is to be situated).

8. Public perception and participation. Were a development to go ahead, it would mean that:
 - 8.1 The vast number of objections submitted has been completely disregarded with the views of residents, the community, councillors, local papers, our MP Alok Sharma, local parish councils, not being valued.
 - 8.2 Planning, which is supposed to enhance the character of an area, and build community cohesion, risks having a diametrically opposite effect on this village-like, close-knit communities of Tilehurst, Calcot and Theale.

A major concern is that although Beyond Green (formerly Blue Living) has shown only two areas to be developed on this site, the whole area of the former Golf Club and the other privately owned sites are outlined in their entirety with a red line which would lead one to assume that the whole of Pincents Hill could in theory be developed. At the outset 950 homes was the suggested total, which was later amended to 750 homes. Although, the plan as suggested is for Outline Planning Permission, should this site by some great misfortune or calamity find its way into the DPD, further clarification and enforcement should be sought.

Although Beyond Green has endeavoured to eliminate some of the reasons given by the Inspector for refusal, the majority of the reasons for refusal still stand. The increase in traffic, the landlocked nature of the site, it is a distinctive and valued land mark, the non integration of the site, the impact on the AONB, the lack of facilities, the times and distances from trains, the loss of a valued leisure area and loss to the wildlife and trees. The three considerably smaller (250 dwellings) previous applications submitted in the 1980's and 90's were refused on Appeal and the last one in 2010 also refused by planning and the Secretary of State.

What sort of environment do we want to leave for our future generations? Once significant natural countryside areas like this are lost, they can never be replaced; they need to be protected and valued for themselves.

We would respectfully ask you to please exclude this site from the DPD as it would not lend itself to development being totally inappropriate.

Joan Lawrie

Joint Chair of the combined
Save Calcot and Save Pincents Hill Action Groups