

# **Planning Application 08/02944/AOP Great Horwood Comments by Great Horwood Parish Council**

## **THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

This document sets out the views of Great Horwood Parish Council (“the Council”) on outline planning application 08/02944/AOP (“the Application”) submitted to Aylesbury Vale District Council (“AVDC”) by Greenway Land LLP (“the Applicant”) under the overall title of Winslow Green, as unanimously agreed by resolution of the Council at its Ordinary Meeting of 9 February 2009.

## **THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE COUNCIL**

**The Council vehemently OPPOSES the Application.**

**In expressing this view it reflects the consistent collective opinion of the residents of Great Horwood. At a Public Meeting called by the Council on 5 February 2009, a Resolution stating “*We the residents of Great Horwood Parish are totally opposed to any development on the old airfield site and adjoining farmland and specifically to the Winslow Green proposal. We ask the Parish Council to oppose this application on our behalf.*” was carried by a margin of 157 residents’ votes to 1, with 1 abstention. An earlier Public Meeting on 8 October 2005 passed a similar resolution. The Parish Plan, adopted and published in April 2006, also called for rejection of proposals for large-scale development on the Little Horwood Airfield site.**

**The Council urges AVDC to refuse the Application for the reasons stated below.**

### **1 Great Horwood as a Community**

This Council places the utmost importance on community values and the integrity of village life. The parish is the home of some 1100 people who have chosen to live here – perhaps by moving here voluntarily, perhaps by birth and opting to remain here. The community that is Great Horwood is a rural yet not isolated one, closely linked to its ancient neighbours in the market town of Winslow and the adjacent parish of Little Horwood. Community life is essentially country life, and the village is resolutely not urban.

The Council has been concerned for many years about the impact on the community of the expanding city of Milton Keynes. So far, the worst fears of the Council have not been realised and Milton Keynes provides a valuable employment and shopping resource. Even with the likely Milton Keynes South West Extension, there will be a corridor between the Horwoods and Milton Keynes that should be wide enough to allow Great Horwood to retain its identity.

Winslow Green is another matter. A new town of 3,300 homes and thus about 8,000 people, more than half of which would be within the parish boundary, cannot but have a major effect on many aspects of village life. The Council believes that the Application would have a highly deleterious effect on social structures, on facilities such as schools and shopping, on noise, pollution and traffic nuisance, on the landscape and ecology, and potentially on the fabric of the village itself.

The Council believes, in short, that Winslow Green would destroy Great Horwood as a community.

## **2 Planning Matters: General**

The South East Plan requires AVDC to provide 26,800 new homes in the planning period to 2026. Of these, the emerging AVDC Local Development Framework ("LDF") provides that 16,800 would be around Aylesbury Town, 5,300 in the Milton Keynes South West Extension (Salden Chase) and 4,700 in the rest of the district. With 2,700 remaining unbuilt on Local Plan allocations and existing commitments, there is a remaining need for 2,000 dwellings for the rest of the district. This would include developments at Buckingham, Wendover, Winslow, and Haddenham and at other sustainable rural settlements.

A further 3,300 homes, as proposed in the Application, clearly falls outside the provisions of the South East Plan and the LDF. There is no need or justification for another 3,300 homes on one site, as proposed in the Application.

## **3 Planning Matters: Great Horwood**

The Council understands that under the terms of the emerging LDF Great Horwood would be designated as a Tier 4 Settlement and would be one of three such in AVDC's Cluster 1 (Northern Vale). It appears to us that this could lead to Great Horwood being expected to absorb 25 to 30 new homes over the period to 2026. The Council feels that this level of development would be acceptable and should, if well-managed, contribute to the vitality of the village.

However, the continuing threat of a possible Winslow Green development (this is merely the latest manifestation of a series of proposals going back to 2001, including an abortive bid for an Eco-Town) means that development land is essentially unavailable, local landowners having sold to or optioned to the Applicant. Until this threat is lifted Great Horwood will not get any significant number of new homes, and certainly no affordable homes.

## **4 Planning Matters: Winslow**

We note that the Planning Statement forming part of the Application states (para 7.1)

*"The need for sustainable development and the need to ensure an increase in housing supply are central to the proposals at Winslow Green. The Application will increase the population of Winslow and thereby lead to a stronger town centre, reducing the need of all local people to travel."*

In fact there is already a successful planning application in place to build 220 homes in Winslow and the emerging AVDC LDF allows for the provision of another 185 in the plan timescale to 2026. We believe that these are realistic numbers which will increase the population of Winslow by some 20% and assist in ensuring the continuing prosperity of the town. The proposal by the Applicant would create a completely separate community. This new settlement would be unlikely to be of any benefit to the existing market town of Winslow and would, we believe, be likely to harm it in the long run by drawing shoppers away to the new facilities to be provided at Winslow Green.

Policy BE4 of the Proposed Changes to the draft South East Plan (Originally Policy BE5: The role of Small Rural market Towns ("Market" Towns)) states that local planning authorities should encourage and initiate schemes and proposals that help strengthen the viability of small rural towns and should "Protect and enhance the character and appearance of individual small rural towns."

The plans currently in place or being proposed by AVDC are very well aligned to these sentiments whereas the proposals in the Application would be more likely to destroy Winslow as a small rural market town. The residents of Great Horwood value the facilities currently provided by Winslow and this Council would not wish to see the centre of the town decline through shoppers being drawn away to a close but unlinked alternative centre.

## 5 Affordable Housing

The current plans for other developments in the vicinity will provide 5,300 homes at Salden Chase, which at its nearest point is less than 3 miles from the centre of Great Horwood, and 400 homes in Winslow which is less than 2 miles away. In total these two developments will therefore provide (at 35%) around 1,900 affordable homes within easy reach of this village. The Council therefore rejects the Applicant's argument that Winslow Green is necessary for the purpose of provision of local affordable housing.

## 6 Provision of Employment

The Council notes two extracts from the Application. The first, taken from the Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary, states (para 3.3)

*"Significant levels of employment would also be created during the construction phase of the development, with up to 350 persons employed at any one time ..."*

The second, from the Economic Impact Assessment, states (para 7.1.13)

*"This suggests that the majority of the construction workforce for the Winslow Green development is likely to be brought in from beyond the district boundary."*

AVDC's Employment Land Study of March 2008 recommends providing for 131,000 m<sup>2</sup> of additional industry and warehousing floorspace and 145,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office floorspace between 2006 and 2026, throughout the whole of Aylesbury Vale. The Application seeks to provide 68,000 m<sup>2</sup> of B1 (office) floorspace on 17 hectares of employment land. This would represent just under half of all new office development in the District to 2026 on this one site. The Council believes this to be disproportionate and unbalanced.

## 7 Making the Best Use of Land

We note that the Planning Statement forming part of the Application states (para 7.52)

*"... development should make best use of land, especially land which has previously developed."*

However, Annex B of Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) provides a definition of previously developed land (often referred to as brownfield land) which specifically excludes

*"Land that was previously-developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape in the process of time (to the extent that it can reasonably be considered as part of the natural surroundings)."*

and adds

*"There is no presumption that land that is previously-developed is necessarily suitable for housing development nor that the whole of the curtilage should be developed."*

It is clear to the Council that almost all the land area that would be used in the proposed development is currently in agricultural use. The part (around 45% only) of the site that includes the former Little Horwood airfield has not been used as such since 15 January 1946. The hard standing that remains on the site represents around 5% of the total area, and much of this serves as farm tracks to replace those obliterated when the airfield was constructed. We believe that the site cannot rationally be considered to be previously-developed land.

Further, we consider that the loss of use of the land for agriculture would be a retrograde and unsustainable step. The site covers 270.2 hectares

## **8 Transport: Road: Construction Traffic**

It is clear that the proposed development would create enormous volumes of traffic during the construction phase. According to the application documentation this would amount to a peak of 50 lorries per day plus a similar number of light vehicles delivering to the site. The number of commercial vehicles would thus be 100 per day at peak times. These figures ignore private cars and other transport used by construction workers.

Vehicle volumes at these levels would have a disastrous impact on Great Horwood as well as on Winslow and other local settlements. The largely concurrent development of 5,300 homes at Salden Chase will be taking place to add to the volumes, not to mention the installation of East West Rail in the area.

The Applicant has stated that he does not intend to build the so-called Relief Road in full prior to starting construction on the site, although he clearly has left himself some room for manoeuvre on timing. Three possible scenarios exist:

- If the Relief Road were initially built only from Shipton to the centre of the site all site traffic would have to reach Shipton before entering the site. Traffic from Milton Keynes, Northampton or other sources North and North-East of the site would thus have to proceed through Great Horwood on the B4033 or divert via Buckingham and the A413, which the Council considers to be unlikely.
- If the Relief Road were built from Shipton through the centre of the site to the proposed Little Horwood Road roundabout, all such traffic would access the site via this roundabout and either the village of Great Horwood or the Little Horwood Road East of the proposed roundabout and Shucklow Hill.
- If the Relief Road were built all the way through from Shipton to the junction of the B4033 with the A421 significant potential would still exist for rat-running through Great Horwood by traffic from Buckingham and other points West and North, as acknowledged by the Applicant.

The Application states (Environmental Statement, para 11.84) that

*“Some traffic will chose to divert to alternative routes, temporarily increasing the propensity for rat-running through villages such as the Horwoods”*

The Council believes that such traffic volumes would add an unjustifiable burden to local village roads as well as to the A413 and A421, and not just temporarily. It has been publicly stated that neither Buckinghamshire County Council nor the Highways Agency nor the Department of Transport have any plans to upgrade either of these roads in the foreseeable future.

The Council notes that construction would extend over a period (including installation of utilities) of 12 to 15 years. It deplores the prospect of the villagers of Great Horwood being subjected to this level of additional traffic noise, pollution, disruption and inconvenience for this length of time.

## **9 Transport: Road: Ongoing Traffic**

Once the development is inhabited it would generate over 20,000 traffic movements per day. Some estimates show even higher figures. Many of these vehicle movements would inevitably be routed through Great Horwood as well as through Winslow and other local villages.

This drastically-increased traffic flow would generate additional noise, pollution, congestion and hazards for Great Horwood as well as for Winslow and Little Horwood. Far from being a temporary phenomenon, these would continue to blight the rural surroundings indefinitely. The Council considers that the parishioners of Great Horwood should not have to shoulder this burden.

It appears likely that the proposed development would significantly add to traffic levels on the A421 and particularly the A413, thus increasing journey times into Aylesbury and adding to the existing peak hour congestion on this route. This would be a substantial disadvantage for Great Horwood villagers which is unlikely to be offset by East West Rail since journey times by this route would be even longer.

#### **10 Transport: Rail**

The Application dwells at length on East West Rail. However, the Council does not accept that the implementation of this project is in any way linked to the Winslow Green outline planning application. The decision as to whether to fund the re-opening of a rail link from Oxford to Milton Keynes and on to Bedford is completely separate from the decision as to approve or refuse the Application.

The Application proposes that a station for Winslow should be sited at the South end of the Winslow Green site. The Council believes that this would be unhelpful and impractical for the Winslow travelling public, and that the previously-envisaged (and reserved) site adjacent to the A413/B4033 junction would be preferable. The Applicant's proposed site would also be likely to lead to increased traffic levels through Great Horwood.

#### **11 Effect on Local Landscape**

The proposed development would stand on rising ground and it is clear that public views from a number of different directions and skylines will be greatly affected by the proposed development with some buildings reaching 4 storeys in height.

#### **12 Foul Drainage**

The Outline Foul Drainage Strategy contained in the Application suggests that some foul drainage may be routed to the Great Horwood STW which it acknowledges has minimal capacity to accommodate additional flows. Any works to provide this (and to service the STW in the future) would require access down Spring Lane, Great Horwood which is unsuitable and unable to cope with such traffic. This was demonstrated by the traffic problems caused recently when problems arose at the STW requiring frequent tanker trips causing traffic and safety problems. Alternative access from the development site would be unacceptable since it would effectively open Spring Lane to use by other traffic (including potentially construction traffic to the site) which it is not capable of accommodating. The development plan clearly shows that Spring Lane would be a "Green Lane" indicating that it is for pedestrian access only.

#### **13 Surface Water**

In times of heavy or continuous rain, surface water from the site already drains down Spring Lane and the adjacent fields (including the new village recreation ground being developed off Spring Lane). As the Environmental Statement in the Application acknowledges (para 17.35), there could be

*"... a major adverse effect on the hydrology of the area prior to any mitigation measures".*

Since this water drains into the stream adjacent to Great Horwood STW, any significant additional flows could cause problems to the STW which would have a material and adverse effect on Great Horwood.

#### **14 Community Facilities**

The Council believes that insufficient hospital capacity exists locally to accommodate a new settlement of 3,300 homes. Neither Stoke Mandeville nor Milton Keynes has investment and enhancement programmes in place that would allow for the increase in population that Winslow Green would represent.

The Council further believes that policing of such a large new town would place substantial demands upon Thames Valley Constabulary in a time when local residents are critical of policing capabilities on today's budgets.

**15 Deliverability**

The Application suggests that Winslow Green has a better chance of delivering completed houses than other alternatives within Aylesbury Vale. However, with planning consent not likely to be achieved until 2010 (if at all) and then a three-year lead time to provide the utilities to the site, it is clear that no completed houses are likely to be available for occupation until around 2014. This is confirmed in the Application's Environmental Statement which states (para 11.81)

*"... The construction programme is likely to start in 2012 with the development road ..."*

Consequently the Council believes that deliverability is not a valid argument in favour of the Application.

**16 Conclusion**

**The Council urges AVDC to refuse the Application**

*Great Horwood, 9 February 2009*