

Langley Vale Action Group's response to Boyer letter dated 25 September

This response to the Boyer letter is submitted because the Langley Vale Action Group is concerned about the misleading and inaccurate assertions regarding compliance with planning policy and failure to properly respond to the nub of the many objections raised by both the Action Group and other third-party interests.

Using the same headings as set out in the Boyer letter we wish to draw attention to the following matters for clarification.

Inappropriate development in the Green Belt

It is by no means demonstrated by the applicant that the proposal is appropriate development in the Green Belt and there is no requirement to demonstrate Very Special Circumstances. We contend that even if the site were deemed to be 'Grey Belt' the loss of this site would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt. Moreover, the development would not be in a sustainable location given the areas reliance on the private car to access services notwithstanding any offer by the applicant to introduce very limited improvements to public transport services. Accordingly, the proposal fails to comply with Para 155 (a) and (c) which means that the development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It also means that Very Special Circumstances would need to be demonstrated to overcome the harm to the Green Belt including its openness.

Sustainability

The applicant cites 'several facilities and amenities' within walking distance. The truth of the matter is more accurately summarised by Surrey County Council's Highway response dated 18 August which states that 'the only real services or activities within reasonable walking distance are a primary school (and at the very end of a steep incline) and a very small and poorly stocked shop associated with a local garage.' Added to this is the Connectivity Index placing the site in the bottom 15 percentile. Other important elements of sustainability that have not been highlighted by the applicant include half of the site comprising Grade 3 (a) 'Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land, the loss of an Area of Great Landscape Value and the damage and loss to important habitats and wildlife including protected species. Meeting environmental objectives as set out in para 187 of the NPPF is fundamental to ensuring development is sustainable.

Landscape and Visual Impact

The applicant misleadingly refers to the development not eroding the visual separation between Langley Vale and the Epsom Downs racecourse. This was never the core of our case on landscape and visual impact. The clear facts are that by developing the open valley field that forms an important access point to and setting for the Epsom Downs landscape, including the Centenary Woodland and racecourse area, is bound to be severely detrimental to landscape character and undermine the Area of Great Landscape Value. This, of course, is one of the key reasons why the site was ruled out within the new Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal as an allocation:

because the 'landscape and visual sensitivity are high and there is a high overall sensitivity to development where the impact on openness considered to be high....Therefore the overall integrity of the Green belt in this location would be considered compromised.'

The applicant asserts that the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment demonstrates that the development can be sensitively achieved on site and then states that 'the detail regarding siting, scale and massing and any subsequent landscape and/or visual impact will be considered at the appropriate time.' This is an obvious contradiction. It is essential to be able to assess the actual impact by visualising the precise siting, scale and massing of the development. Without this key information it is ridiculous for the applicant to claim that the proposal would have a 'moderate adverse' impact reducing to 'minor adverse' as planting matures. Given the open, rural nature of the application site, the construction of a housing estate is bound to constitute a significant change. Not only physically but also through activity, noise and lighting arising out of the proposal. We contend that the proposal would have a significant adverse visual impact on the rural character of the site and surrounding area.

Ecology and Biodiversity

The applicant relies on the site walkover surveys referred to in the Ecological Impact Appraisal but fails to effectively respond to all the evidence presented by local residents to the presence of protected species on and around the site. For example, evidence presented by the Chairman of the West Surrey Badger Group confirms the presence of badgers and the need for a detailed survey during the winter months when the heavy undergrowth along the field margins is reduced before any decision on the application can be made.

Highways

The applicant claims that Surrey County Highways has raised no concerns regarding the traffic impact of the development and no concerns about the safety of site access junction. On both counts this is untrue. Firstly, Surrey County Highway Authority has recommended refusal because of the high level of reliance on private car use in this locality and inability to prioritise sustainable transport modes. Secondly it recommends refusal because there is insufficient forward visibility for northbound traffic turning into the site creating danger to users of the highway.

Reference is made to objectors claims that up to 250 car parking spaces may be required on site to accommodate the parking demand. The applicant then refers to parking being a reserved matter and will be provided in accordance with their Borough's parking standards. The fact of the matter is that applying the parking standards to a scheme of 110 dwellings with a presumed mix of mainly 2,3 and 4 bed houses will result in the order of 250 car parking spaces having to be provided. The Langley Vale Action Group has recently undertaken a household survey which shows that most Langley Vale households have at least 2 cars because of the poor availability of public transport services and dependence on the private car to access work and services. There is no reason why this scheme would be any different.

Local Infrastructure and Community Facilities

The applicant refers to CIL contributions addressing local service and community infrastructure needs but it is clear that there are site-specific mitigation measures which would require substantial S106 funding over and above the proposed S106 Heads of Terms. An example of this is water supply and foul water drainage. The applicant claims that Thames Water has confirmed clean water and foul water capacity for the proposed development. Yet Thames Water in their response dated 13 August clearly state that they have been unable to determine the foul water infrastructure needs and that network re-enforcement works may be required to accommodate the proposal so as to avoid sewage flooding and pollution incidents. Similarly with water supply Thames Water confirms that the water network infrastructure requires upgrading to accommodate the additional demand arising from the development. The problem with low water pressure is borne out in the aforementioned Action Group's recent Langley Vale household survey which shows that many householders already experience low water pressure problems.

Another example of key infrastructure requirement arising from any planning consent would be the provision of a bridleway along the eastern side of Langley Vale Road up to the existing bridleway junction north of Langley Vale, as suggested by the Jockey Club to avoid horses having to cross the highway to access the 5-furlong gallop north of the application site.

Impact on Racehorse Industry

The applicant dismisses the safety concerns to horses and riders arising from the site's development as 'not significant' and 'not material'. We would urge the Local Planning Authority to rely more on the evidence provided by the representatives of those involved, namely, the Epsom & Walton Training Grounds Management Board Ltd and The Jockey Club. They are both unequivocal in assessing the proposal as posing substantial risks to the safety of horses and riders arising from the increased traffic arising from the site development directly adjacent to the horse racing training areas and access routes. They also raise significant safety concerns from any increased pedestrian/cycling use along Bridleway 127 (as advocated by the applicant as a convenient route to Tattenham Corner for residents) which is also a key access route for the operation of the training grounds.