

Land at Colwell Farm, Lewes Road: Education and Road safety

A speech opposing the appeal against the refusal of application DM/25/0445

Mr Burnham, thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Lucie Baker and I live at 45 Lewes Road – almost opposite the proposed development – with my husband and 2 children aged 16 and 17.

I am a member of the Protect Colwell Farm Action Group, but am speaking in my own right.

I want to focus today on two subjects that are too easily reduced to a Section 106 line items: school places and road safety.

Education

- I would also like to address the issue of education. I am a maths teacher at Warden Park.
- The Appellant argues that any pressure on local schools can be resolved through Section 106 contributions.
- However, that argument assumes there is available capacity in nearby schools for additional pupils.
- The reality is that there is not.
- This proposed development is **outside the catchment area for both Harlands Primary School and Warden Park Secondary School**, despite those being schools that many local families would naturally expect to attend.
- That means children living on this development would not have priority for places at either school, adding further uncertainty for families.
- Northlands Wood Primary School, the nearest primary school within catchment, has a capacity of **420 pupils** and currently has **419 pupils on roll**. It is effectively full.
- Warden Park School has a capacity of **1,500 pupils** but currently has **1,541 pupils**, meaning it is already operating over capacity.
- Oathall Community College has a capacity of **1,350 pupils** and currently has **1,341 pupils**, leaving very little room for additional demand.
- Chailey School has a capacity of **870 pupils** and currently has **862 pupils**, meaning it is also close to capacity.

Why this matters

- Families moving into this development cannot simply assume that a place will be available at their nearest or preferred school.
- The schools they are most likely to apply to are either already full, over capacity, or close to capacity.
- Section 106 funding cannot create school places where there is no physical capacity available.
- It cannot instantly provide new classrooms, additional teaching staff or expanded school buildings.
- The likely outcome is that children will have to travel even further to schools with available places.

- This will inevitably increase car journeys and traffic, directly contradicting the application's ambition to encourage children to walk or cycle to school.

Closing point

- Before approving a development of this scale, there should be clear evidence that there are sufficient school places available for the families who will live there.
- In this case, the evidence points in the opposite direction.
- With the site outside the catchment for Harlands Primary and Warden Park, and surrounding schools already at or beyond capacity, I do not believe the education impacts of this development have been adequately addressed.

Road safety

- The planning application suggests that children will be able to walk or cycle to school safely. In reality, this does not reflect the conditions on this road.
- This is the main route into Haywards Heath from Uckfield, Newick, Chailey and the surrounding villages, making it one of the busiest roads in the area.
- Traffic regularly queues from the proposed development site all the way to the Birch Hotel—around a mile—particularly on bin collection days.
- Vehicles frequently exceed the 30mph and 40mph speed limits, making the road feel unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Pedestrians are forced to cross the road several times because there is no continuous pavement along the route.
- There are no dedicated cycle lanes. Have the developers even checked this?
- The pavement is narrow with overgrown hedges/bushes and offers little protection from fast-moving traffic.
- Crossing the road is difficult and intimidating, particularly for children.
- During the winter months there is very limited, if any, street lighting along sections of the route.
- Children walking home after school are often doing so in darkness, which further increases the safety risk.

Personal experience

- My husband and I both work, so our two children have sometimes had to walk home from Warden Park School in Cuckfield.
- The journey takes well over an hour.
- As a parent, the thought of them walking alongside and crossing this road is genuinely worrying because of the volume and speed of traffic.
- In winter, when it gets dark early, they have to use the torch on their phones because of the lack of street lighting.

Cycling concerns

- My 16 year old son wants to cycle to visit his friends.
- I currently tell him to cycle on the pavement because I do not believe it is safe for him to ride on the road.

- I appreciate that cycling on the pavement is not ideal, but it feels like the safer option given the traffic conditions.

Impact of the development

- This proposal is for around 80 additional homes.
- There are currently between 70&80 houses on the Haywards Heath section of Lewes Road, so the proposed development would approximately double the number of houses in this small area using this small stretch of road
- Most households today own at least two cars.
- That could mean well over 150 additional vehicles using this already congested road on a regular basis.
- The application does not appear to provide meaningful improvements to pedestrian safety, cycling infrastructure or traffic calming.
- Without significant measures to reduce vehicle speeds and protect pedestrians and cyclists, I do not believe the development provides a safe environment for families.

Closing point

- Before approving a development that encourages sustainable travel, the committee should be satisfied that children can genuinely walk and cycle safely. In my view, the current road conditions fall well short of that standard.