

Land at Colwell Farm, Lewes Road: Education and Healthcare

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 Simon Pockett and I live at 41 Lewes Road – opposite the proposed development – with my wife and 2 children aged 11 and 15.

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 GP capacity.

Education

The Appellant argues that any strain on local schools can be resolved through Section 106 contributions. That argument assumes there is spare capacity nearby for money to buy. There is not.

Northlands Wood Primary School, the nearest school to the site, has a capacity of 420 places and was recorded with 419 pupils on roll, meaning it is effectively full ¹. The nearest secondary schools are in the same position. Warden Park has a capacity of 1,500 and 1,541 pupils on roll, over capacity ². Oathall Community College has a capacity of 1,350 with 1,341 pupils ³. Chailey School, a further alternative, has a capacity of 870 with 862 pupils currently ⁴. Every realistic option for a family moving into this development is already at or near its limit.

Lucie, a local resident who is also speaking today teaches at Warden Park, described the pressure from the inside:

¹ Department for Education, Northlands Wood Primary School, get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Establishments/Establishment/Details/144453.

² Department for Education, Warden Park Secondary Academy, get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Establishments/Establishment/Details/137416.

³ Department for Education, Oathall Community College, get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Establishments/Establishment/Details/126085.

⁴ Department for Education, Chailey School, get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/establishments/establishment/details/114594.

Section 106 money can fund a classroom extension years down the line, but it cannot conjure a school place for a child the September after they move in. Nor does the Appellant's own transport case allow for this: the walking distances quoted for the scheme assume children can simply walk to their catchment school, without accounting for the fact that the nearest schools cannot take them, pushing real journeys, real traffic, further and longer than the application acknowledges.

Healthcare

The same pattern repeats in primary care. Northlands Wood Surgery, the GP practice serving this site, was recorded in February 2025 NHS workforce data with 3,171 patients for every full-time equivalent GP ⁵. To put that in context, the historic benchmark for safe GP workload, set by the 1966 Family Doctor Charter GP Contract, was a limit of 2,000 patients per GP ⁶, a level the BMA describes as recognising *“the need for effective workload management as a basis for . . . safe, high-quality patient care.”*⁷ Northlands Wood is already operating at more than one and a half times that benchmark, and well above the national average GP list size, which the BMA put at 2,295 patients per GP in its most recent report ⁸.

Adding up to 80 new households to this practice's catchment, without a fully funded and staffed expansion secured before occupation, does not merely stretch a struggling service further. It risks pushing waiting times up and access down for every patient already registered there, old and new alike. A Section 106 contribution toward a future health facility is not the same as a guarantee of a GP appointment when a resident's child is ill.

Conclusion

Education and healthcare are not separate technical boxes to be ticked by conditions and contributions. They are the everyday infrastructure that determines whether a development is genuinely sustainable, or whether it simply transfers the costs of growth onto residents

⁵NHS Digital, General Practice Workforce data, February 2025, digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/data-tools-and-services/data-services/general-practice-data-hub/workforce, practice code H82100 (Northlands Wood Surgery).

⁶British Medical Association, “Safe working in general practice in England,” guidance, bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/gp-practices/managing-workload/safe-working-in-general-practice, citing the Family Doctor Charter and 1966 GP Contract, and reporting a national average of 2,295 patients per GP.

who are already coping with full schools and an overstretched surgery. I ask the Inspector to weigh that reality carefully, and to dismiss this appeal.