Ms Cooke

MM71: Land West of Ockley Lane, Hassocks

a. Movement

Access

I have significant concerns regarding the proposed access arrangements for the site. The proposed access would be located at one of the narrowest points of Ockley Lane, a road which is already constrained by bends, gradients and limited visibility. At this location, Ockley Lane is effectively a single carriageway, with no centre line and no pedestrian infrastructure.

The road is also used by pedestrians accessing the network of public footpaths and bridleways in the area. It is common to see walkers using the carriageway itself because there is no pavement. Given the existing physical constraints, I do not believe there is sufficient space to provide safe pedestrian infrastructure alongside the access arrangements.

The addition of traffic associated with a further 250 homes raises serious concerns regarding highway safety for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.

Effect on the Road Network

This proposal should not be considered in isolation. The cumulative impact of development in this area is a key concern.

Five hundred homes have already recently been built at Ockley Park immediately adjoining the site, while the District Plan also includes the Batchelor's Farm allocation further north along the same Ockley Lane/Keymer Road corridor. The combined effect of these developments would place substantial additional pressure on the local road network.

I am also concerned that the recent traffic survey was undertaken during July when the independent school at the top of Ockley Lane/Keymer Road was closed for the summer .0holidays. As a result, the survey may significantly underestimate normal term-time traffic levels and therefore fail to capture the true level of congestion and road usage.

Pedestrian and Cycling Proposals

The site's location raises concerns regarding its suitability for active travel.

There is currently no pedestrian infrastructure along key sections of Ockley Lane, while Keymer Road already feels unsafe for cyclists due to its narrow width and existing traffic volumes. Additional vehicle trips generated by the development would further increase conflicts between motorists and active travellers.

The site therefore appears poorly placed to encourage walking and cycling as realistic alternatives to car travel.

Availability and Frequency of Bus Services

More broadly, I question the overall transport sustainability of the site. Owing to its location, many day-to-day journeys are likely to be undertaken by car.

Residents will require access to railway stations, schools, healthcare services, shops and other facilities. Given the site's relative isolation, many of these trips are likely to involve private vehicles. Unless there is convincing evidence that public transport provision is sufficiently frequent, convenient and attractive, the development risks becoming heavily car-dependent.

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b. Landscape and Countryside

Effect on the Separate Identity of Settlements

I am extremely concerned about the impact of the proposal on the remaining strategic gap between Burgess Hill and Hassocks/Keymer.

Development of MM71 would significantly erode the remaining area of separation between these settlements and contribute towards their gradual coalescence. The gap performs an important role in maintaining the distinct identity and character of both communities.

I would ask the Inspector to consider the reasoning applied to the refusal of the land south of Wellhouse Lane allocation, located close to MM71 on the opposite side of Ockley Lane, where concerns about settlement coalescence formed part of the justification for rejecting development.

Effect on the Countryside, Access, Trees, Woodland and Wildlife

The site forms part of an important area of open countryside and contributes significantly to local landscape character.

Development would further erode the remaining green space between Burgess Hill and Hassocks and would adversely affect views towards the South Downs from the popular network of local footpaths within the adjoining Green Circle land between the Water Tower and Burgess Hill station. These routes are widely used by walkers and dog walkers and derive much of their value from their open countryside setting.

I am also concerned about biodiversity impacts, including effects on habitats associated with nearby ancient woodland and on protected and native species occupying the site and surrounding land. I have personally observed barn owls and numerous other species in the area.

Whilst mitigation measures may be proposed, they cannot fully compensate for the permanent loss of open countryside, established habitats and the ecological value of currently undeveloped land. Given the wider challenges of biodiversity loss, the destruction of additional natural habitat should not be regarded as sustainable development.

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c. Infrastructure

Social and Community Facilities

The existing pressure on local services demonstrates that infrastructure is already struggling to accommodate recent population growth.

My daughter was unable to secure a place at Windmills Junior School in Hassocks and instead had to travel to Burgess Hill for primary education. Other families face similar circumstances, generating additional journeys and placing further pressure on local roads.

Healthcare provision is also under strain. Despite living in Hassocks for two years, we have been unable to access an NHS dentist locally. These existing capacity issues suggest that local services are already struggling to meet current demand.

Utilities and Potential Impediments to Delivery

I have experienced repeated issues with local water infrastructure. There have been occasions when households in the area have lost water pressure and neighbouring properties have experienced complete water loss.

Most significantly, my daughter's school was forced to close because there was no water supply, resulting in the loss of a day's education for all pupils. These incidents raise serious questions regarding the capacity and resilience of existing utility infrastructure.

Before further development is allocated, there should be clear evidence that water and other essential utility services can accommodate additional demand without creating further disruption for existing residents.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, I maintain my objection to the allocation of MM71. The site raises significant concerns regarding highway safety, cumulative traffic impacts, transport sustainability, settlement separation, countryside loss, biodiversity impacts and the adequacy of existing infrastructure. Taken together, these impacts demonstrate that MM71 is not an appropriate allocation and should not be included in the Mid Sussex District Plan.

This version is much stronger because it directly reflects the points you actually submitted, while aligning neatly with the Inspector's agenda so they can readily map your evidence to the examination topics.