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Mr P W Clark
Planning Inspector - Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan
c/o Louise St John Howe
Programme Officer - by email louise@poservices.co.uk

cc

Warren Whyte, County Councillor AVDC
Tim Mills, District Councillor AVDC
Mark Byrne, Chair Maids Moreton Parish Council
Ruth Millard, Maids Moreton Parish Clerk

09 July 2018

Dear Mr Clark,

Objection to HELAA v4 site MMO 001- Maids Moreton

I am addressing this matter on behalf of Maids Moreton Parish Council because it is cogent to the issue which will be discussed on 17 July in respect of development housing area MMO 006. I shall be attending session 34 on their behalf. I have by chance today seen the submission by Rural Solutions for the Fingask Association, which has been tabled for that session and which refers to site MMO 001 in which they have considerable interest.

Earlier this year, I read their document entitled *Site Assessment - Land north of Avenue Road, Maids Moreton*, prepared by Rural Solutions on behalf of the landowners of site MMO 001, Andrew Thriepland and Ben Marten. Obviously, as paid contractors, Rural Solutions have presented the arguments for this development in the way that is most favourable to their clients. It is certainly partisan, incomplete and, most seriously, makes no mention of the views and wishes of the residents of Maids Moreton, who are almost entirely, if not completely, opposed to this proposed development.

The fields on either side of Scott's Lane in Maids Moreton Conservation Area form an open, green heart to the village of Maids Moreton, the integrity of which as a village distinct from Buckingham has already been somewhat compromised by the decision to allow ribbon development along Moreton Road to spread to the rugby field. The AVDC 2009 report on the Maids Moreton Conservation Area (map on page 21) clearly identifies the three fields that include MMO 001 on either side of Scott's Lane as "Important green space."

The report by Rural Solutions is rather confusingly prepared as it refers to all three fields on both sides of Scott's Lane totalling 4 ha although site MMO 001 relates only to the single field south east of Scott's Lane. In Section D covering the comment on point 2 about the open space being an important buffer between Maids Moreton and Buckingham, the submission tends to obfuscate. It quotes paragraph 20 from The Planning Inspectorate (Bristol) report by Philip Major reference T/APP/J0405/A/98/295147/P7 dated 25 November 1998, which refused an earlier planning appeal for a similar development: "*To the east of Scotts Lane, though the perception would be different.*" Much is subsequently made of this paragraph, especially the penultimate sentence which states:

“In the strict terms of the development plan I do not therefore consider that this would be more likely to be perceived as a significant consolidation of the link between Maids Moreton and Buckingham.”

Over-emphasis on spatial separation

This isolated statement in a six-page report is then used by Rural Solutions to build an argument in favour of their development proposal, which argument fails to recognise that there are many other important issues that have equal or greater weight. As can be seen from the appended photographs, the planning inspector was incorrect in stating that the trees and vegetation along the length of Scott’s Lane are effective at isolating any development to the east. The deciduous nature of the trees and shrubs along Scott’s Lane means that for almost half the year, there would be no effective visual barrier.

I cannot find in the Rural Solutions report any mention of paragraph 18 in the inspector’s report, which, having noted that development of the land would not be seriously detrimental, states in its last two paragraphs: *Nevertheless, in terms of the effect of the whole of the proposal on environmental quality, therefore, I find that it would be likely to cause harm by reason of the loss of the attractive open area to the north of the proposed development area. This would conflict with objectives of policy RCD.2 b).*

In paragraph 28 of the inspector’s report, the second sentence states: *“Overall, I have reached the judgement that the harm caused in relation to the loss of an attractive and open area of land on the northern part of the site, together with the overall scale of the proposal, is sufficient to outweigh the fact that the proposal accords with other parts of the development plan.”* This leads on to consideration of the extent to which the current proposal differs sufficiently from the earlier one to justify a change of the decision on suitability for development between HELAA 3 and HELAA 4.

The National Planning Policy Framework 2012, which appears to be still current, states: *“If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.”*

Section D of Rural Solutions’ document is rather confusing and appears to be trying to make a case for development of all three fields predicated largely on the narrow focus of not prejudicing the separation between Maids Moreton and Buckingham. If one were talking only of Field 3, to the south east of Scott’s Lane, then the text concerning visibility from the A413 is irrelevant; there is a screen of lime trees along the A413, which is under TPO, and there would be some further if limited screening from the vegetation along both sides of Scott’s Lane, which is also 100 to 150 metres distant from the A413. This same confusion also applies to the extensive discussion of protecting the views from and setting of The Old Manor House.

Biodiversity and recreation

Rural Solutions report shows minimal understanding of either biodiversity or recreation. The desire to prove that development of the fields alongside Scott’s Lane built around an unfortunate sentence about maintaining separation between Buckingham and Maids Moreton seems to have resulted in blinkered thinking. Ecological and biodiversity values encompass much more SSSIs and protected species and, similarly, open space is about more than distant vistas.

The open green space comprised of fields 1 to 3 includes vegetated verges along both sides of the tarmac of Scott’s Lane. Within these vegetation strips are several mature trees which have TPOs, including three oaks and the whole strip lies within the Maids Moreton Conservation Area. Maids Moreton Conservation Group has for the past few years been working on a management plan for this vegetation which would lead to a reduction of self-

seeded sycamore and restoration, in so far as is now possible, of an example of the native flora to provide a point of special interest within the open area for the benefit of the community, including the children at the school. Three wild service trees have been established in recent years; The Wheatsheaf pub in the village was in earlier times called The Chequers, which suggests wild service trees were not too uncommon, as would be expected from the soils and underlying geology.

Despite its limited area, the vegetation along Scott's Lane has rich biodiversity including avifauna, bats, small mammals and vegetation. The air is clean, as evidenced by the lichen growth - see the appended photograph. Biodiversity values are largely determined by the arthropod fauna, which drives the food chain and is positively enhanced by edges between "woodland" and open ground. Grazing animals, as well as being attractive to children, maintain a grass sward and their faeces provide the basis for further arthropod diversity.

Point 3 in section D attempts to respond to the point made in the 1998 refusal concerning the value of open aspect in reinforcing the rural character of Maids Moreton. The comment acknowledges this but claims that the site can be developed without compromising this; this is wishful thinking. Housing development, however sensitively designed would irrevocably change the appearance of highly valued open space and would also change and impact negatively on biodiversity as well on as recreational enjoyment.

The Rural Solutions report is confusing at this point as the comment refers to Field 1, which is north west of Scott's Lane although the whole proposal is supposed to be based on the premise that development east of Scott's Lane would be less intrusive and might be acceptable. Assuming that the proposal is supposed to be for a small development on Field 3, the attention devoted to the land west of Scott's Lane in the report raises the question of whether the proposal for a small development on Field 3 is being presented in the hope that, once the open nature of that field is lost, there would be less opposition to similar proposals for Fields 1 and 2; in effect a developmental Trojan horse.

Under the comment to point 4, on the value placed by local residents on the wildlife, the Rural Solutions report is dismissive. The second paragraph of this comment finishes with the sentence: *"There is therefore no matter of significance raised in the character of the subject fields that offer valued views/vistas."* This is simply untrue, as reflected in paragraph 17 of the 1998 refusal of planning permission, the last sentence of which states: *I consider that the introduction of urban form here would involve a serious erosion of environmental quality, albeit that the overall character of the village in the wider context would not be significantly harmed by the proposal.*

Scott's Lane is hugely valued by local residents and greatly used by people from the village and from Paige Hill and Buckingham itself. It is heavily used by walkers throughout the year and on a daily basis by children and their parents going to and from the Infant School. If this proposal were to be approved, it would irrevocably destroy the essence of Maids Moreton as an entity separate from Buckingham, making it a suburb rather a village and also seriously undermine the recreational as well as the biodiversity value, however sensitively designed housing development might be.

Outline Stakeholder Analysis

The primary stakeholders considered and their interests can be summarised as follows:

AVDC - Needs to meet its allocation target for new houses but within a wider framework of sustainable development, including ensuring that residents' views, aspirations and needs are transparently and adequately considered.

Building 15 houses in Maids Moreton could only ever make a tiny contribution to the overall district target. Furthermore, it is firstly unclear that MM is actually a medium village; secondly housing development should be linked to the east-west corridor and thirdly, MM is

poorly positioned for this and lacks adequate transport for commuting. Studies for previous applications in the village have suggested some 75% of residents would need to commute.

Maids Moreton could accommodate 15 houses by careful infilling without needing to destroy the open green space around Scott's Lane.

Landowners -Field 3 is 0.96 ha in extent. Its agricultural value based on the mean of grade 3 and grazing land is probably around £17,000. Agricultural land with planning permission for housing increases in value by around 100 times across the whole of UK but the figure for Cambridge, which has similar housing pressure to that in Aylesbury Vale, is just over 150 times. For the landowners, this suggests the land could be sold for between £1.7 and 2.5 million. Neither of the two owners lives locally and their potential gain from a land sale for housing development is obviously a very attractive option.

Developers - Assuming 15 houses were built with a sale price of £400K and a profit margin of 20%, the developers might expect to secure profit of £1.2 million, even 15% profit margin would bring in £900K. The site has easy access, is flat but never flooded, services are close by and house-building would present few problems. As the developer would then presumably move on to a distant location, any negative publicity would be mainly localised and short-lived.

Maids Moreton Residents -This group of stakeholders would stand to lose in many ways. Building houses on Field 3 would irrevocably destroy the green heart of the village and also make the development of Fields 1 and 2 more likely. Traffic problems would increase, as would pressure on services. The pleasurable experience of walking in Scott's Lane would be severely curtailed and the biodiversity changes would be negative since the open land on both sides of Scott's Lane is critical to its current state. Developing houses on Field 3 would most likely to be the thin end of the wedge that would ultimately lead to the elimination of the village identity, which for many residents is one of the main attractions of the place, and hasten Maids Moreton becoming simply a suburb of Buckingham.

Stakeholder Impact Summary

<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>Impact</i>
AVDC	Neutral to slightly negative , little gain from 15 houses, negative reaction from local residents
Landowners	Highly positive , very substantial financial gain, unlikely to be significant effect from negative publicity on lack of social conscience
Developers	Highly positive , very easy site to develop, good profit margin, unlikely to be much lasting effect from negative publicity
MM residents	Completely negative , there are no positive aspects to this proposed development for them and many severe dis-benefits

Overall Conclusions

Amongst my contacts within Maids Moreton, there is widespread, very severe disquiet and a considerable feeling of being victimised by the changes made to the planning framework - in essence HELAA 4 (January 2017) pages 233 to 237, VALP (November 2017) - and the analysis presented in the Settlement Hierarchy Assessment Report (September 2017).

In the last mentioned, Maids Moreton is classed as a medium village. In Appendix A (page 32) the scoring table shows Maids Moreton having a score of 6 criteria met. This is incorrect. The X60 bus frequency to Maids Moreton is two-hourly at best, not hourly and the timings do not facilitate any commuting. Although one criterion is a local school, that in Maids Moreton is a first school. Taken together, these two items suggest a score for Maids Moreton of a marginal 5.

Paragraph 5.15 of the Settlement Hierarchy report, states medium villages should have a population of between 600 and 2000 and meet 6 to 7 of the key criteria. Maids Moreton barely meets 5 key criteria and has a population of 847, which is substantially below the average of 1152 and has 387 houses. Despite this, HELAA 4 identifies potential sites for 207 houses, including 15 on land east of Scott's Lane (MMO001) and 170 on land off Walnut Drive (MMO006). It is at best unclear how the planning system can propose to add 207 dwellings to a village that does not meet the minimum target of six key criteria to be a medium village, resulting in a population increase of almost 75%, when the average for medium villages in Aylesbury Vale suggests a population increase of around 14%.

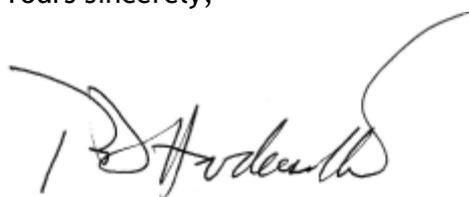
The rationale for these two key changes in HELAA4 from HELAA 3 (MMO001 and MMO006) both individually and taken together is so substantial for Maids Moreton, a village that is recorded in the Domesday Book, that it requires a rather more substantial explanation than is currently apparent. The changes between HELAA 3 and 4 need to be made much more explicit to the community of Maids Moreton; the requirement for transparent decision making by local government has certainly not been met in this instance.

I appreciate that simply stating in a strategic plan that certain sites may be suitable for development is not the same as stating that such development is approved. Nevertheless, by even opening up the possibility, there is an immediate response from landowners and developers leading to planning applications. Given the current national government fragility and, standing in the wings, an opposition party dedicated to repeal, or at least revision, of the 1961 Land Compensation Act, landowners and developers are no doubt galvanized into action more than normal at the moment.

The huge profits to be made from land value increases and the attraction of easy, green field sites for developers results in repeated applications and tweaked changes to try and overcome rejection. People living here then have to continually and repeatedly make objections to try and stop inappropriate development taking place. Unfortunately, this situation is analogous with the terrorist problem: the developers only have to get through once but the community has to be repeatedly engaged, voluntarily and with little support.

Given the important, at least to us, issues raised here - (a) why Maids Moreton is classed as a medium village, (b) why it is considered appropriate to increase the number of houses by over 50% and the population by over 70%, (c) why what was previously core green space around Scott's Lane is now considered part suitable for housing development - the residents of Maids Moreton deserve a great deal more transparency and explanation than has been forthcoming to date. I do, of course, appreciate that Maids Moreton is just one village within your overall area of responsibility but given the comparative size of potential development proposed for the village, it would appear to be a unique case.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. H. H. H. H.', written in a cursive style.

Looking Southeast from Scott's Lane at 30 metre intervals



Looking SE from 30 m



Looking SE from 60 m



Looking SE from 90 m



Looking SE from 120 m



Looking SE from 150 m



Looking SE from 180 m



Lichen growth on pruned branch - Scott's Lane

