



Wicor Primary School
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Dear Kim Hayler on behalf of Fareham Borough Council

Planning application ref P/15/0260/OA

I wish to **object** to the above planning application to build 120 houses on the field north of Cranleigh Road, Portchester.

I am disappointed that the local community is having to endure the stress of fighting to save this valuable piece of land from destruction in what is less than a year from the last objection. However, having considered the new planning proposal, my objections remain as before and the reduction in the number of houses will have no mitigating effect on the rich wildlife ecosystem that is under threat. I cannot think of a single benefit to the local community or wildlife that accrues from this planning proposal.

There are three main reasons for my objection.

STRATEGIC GAP

A look at the latest 1:50 000 Ordnance survey map (196 The Solent and the Isle of Wight) clearly shows the relatively small amount of undeveloped green space to the west of Portchester, separating Portchester and Fareham. The Portchester Gap is, therefore, a hugely important open space that not only provides habitats for a rich variety of wildlife but provides an essential and increasingly rare gap in what has become known as 'Solent City', in recognition of the creeping urbanisation of the region. The proposed housing estate is sited on the northern fringe of Portsmouth Harbour, designated a Ramsar site, SSSI and Special Protection Area, reflecting the relative ecological and environmental value of the remaining green area. Any threat to this valuable area of land is unacceptable and must not be permitted. My concern is that should permission be given to destroy the field north of Cranleigh Road which is, I believe, Grade 2 agricultural land, then a precedent will be set for the destruction of the final unbuilt areas between Portchester and Fareham. **Coastal grassland habitats such as the Cranleigh field are relatively rare survivals.** Not only would the local community lose a valuable wildlife habitat but the open spaces which give a sense of being out in the countryside and which contribute to people's well-being, would be lost too - permanently. This is too high a price to pay; we simply must not allow this destruction to happen. I believe we have a responsibility as stewards to protect these last remaining, valuable parcels of green land embedded in urban and suburban areas.

WILDLIFE

I believe that there is no way back for the rich and diverse plant and animal life currently living in, or depending on, the field for food and habitat if the planned destruction goes ahead. The building process and resultant housing estate will undoubtedly destroy the balanced ecosystem of the coastal grassland habitat and will effectively signal the end for life depending on it, such as the local population of hedgehogs, a creature whose population crash is the subject of national concern.

Although I understand there were serious reservations about the reliability of much of the 'ecological survey' findings undertaken by Lindsay Carrington Ecological Services on behalf of the developer a year ago, the survey nonetheless helpfully highlighted the fact that, although this is only a relatively small field, there is an impressive range of wildlife that either lives in or around the field or uses it on a regular basis as part of their territory.

I understand that these concerns remain despite a more recent survey. There are concerns about the methodology used to, for example, establish populations of reptiles and dormice. It would appear that the survey is more concerned with supporting the development by playing down the harmful and potentially catastrophic impacts to the wildlife rather than being an accurate, rigorous survey based on science and scientific methods.

I work at Wicor Primary School, which directly adjoins the eastern perimeter of the field. Over the past 15 years the school has worked on creating an outdoor space comprising a number of wildlife habitats. We have created a wild pond, an orchard with wildflower meadow, a hedgehog habitat, a stumpery, various bug houses and minibeast habitats and planted areas of native trees and shrubs. The result of our work has been not only to provide a first class environmental learning resource for 438 children but also to effectively extend the wildlife rich habitat of the surrounding green spaces, including the field next door. We have seen many of the animal species listed in the ecological survey mentioned above, in our school grounds and additional species too.

We have not undertaken a systematic survey of the wildlife; to date there has been no need. However, we do note when we see species in our grounds or in the adjacent field and these include a number of important creatures;

- Mammals
 - Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) including a photo taken of them in the field itself. These have been sighted on a number of separate occasions and we have seen as many as four deer together. We have photographs of deer in the field taken this month.
 - Badgers (*Meles meles*) use our grounds as part of their territory including a latrine in our orchard and on the field perimeter fence. Badgers are regular visitors and have been sighted on many occasions including making appearances on our CCTV – seen in the field too.
 - Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) including cubs – seen in the field too.
 - Stoat (*Mustela erminea*)
 - Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*); these endangered mammals have colonised a designated wild space along the perimeter fence abutting the field.
 - Grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolensis*).
 - Bat (many sightings – haven't been able to identify the species).

- Birds - many species including;
 - Curlew, Green Woodpecker, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Sparrowhawk, Heron, Goldcrest, Long Tailed Tit, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Blackbird, Crow, Jay, Magpie, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Dunnock, Robin, Chiffchaff, Collard Dove, Wood pigeon, Red Legged Partridge and chicks, Pheasant, Mallard, Pied Wagtail, Starling and Greenfinch. Brent Geese have used our field to graze on more than one occasion. These birds reflect the rural and coastal nature of our area.

- Reptiles
 - Slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*); these frequent our wood piles, compost heaps and hay stack. We have counted a least five together on one occasion. These turn up quite regularly during environmental work.

- Amphibians
 - Palmate Newt (*Lissotriton helveticus*)
 - Smooth Newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*)
 - Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)
 - Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*)

Our site supports a huge range of invertebrates and includes many beetles (including sightings of a Stag Beetle); moths including the Hummingbird Hawkmoth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*); spiders including the Cucumber Spider (*Araniella cucurbitina*) and Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruennichi*); butterflies (including migrant butterflies such as the Painted Lady); bees and wasps and a variety of pond life including damselflies. Being a coastal site, we are host to migrant species; we have, for example, seen Brent Geese, Painted Ladies and Chiffchaffs in our grounds.

I am not making the case that we have undertaken a rigorous study of the wildlife on our site but we can be confident in our claim that our grounds support a rich and diverse range of native animal and plant species and this is in large part due to their physical ecological connection to the adjacent field.

It is worth making the point that we see all this wildlife despite 'work' by contractors in the past year, strimming, uprooting and spraying in the field. I do not know the purpose of this activity but I can confidently say that it does not appear to be taking place to support and encourage wildlife. Nor has there been any management of the site that can be considered sympathetic to wildlife. This concerns me greatly and ***I would not want a case to be made for a lack of wildlife when the reasons for this have been due to recent intrusive activity and a lack of sympathetic management.*** This is unacceptable.

Our school's environmental curriculum and our approach to learning have been recognised as being of very high quality. Our school won the Segensworth Environmental Award in 2010, 2012, and 2014; we are the only school in the country to be awarded Plant Guardian Status by the Royal Horticultural Society who also recently awarded the school its top 5 Star rating in recognition of our contribution to the community. Our school grounds are open to the public as part of the National Gardens Scheme; again we are the only state school to our knowledge that meet the criteria to do this. Cams Secondary School use our grounds to support their Science and Art curriculum and recently we have hosted a meetings of the Portsmouth Science Association and the RHS who are both keen to use our resources and expertise to develop outdoor learning in other schools.

Wicor's vision is for us all to become effective lifelong learners in an inspirational learning community

We gained national status as a Green Ambassador School in 2014, granted by the World Wildlife Fund, in recognition of our Food and Growing curriculum and our work on developing the natural environment for wildlife. Recently we were shortlisted for the national 2015 Observer Green Oscar award – a very prestigious occasion. Most recently, we were the launch primary school for the new Hampshire County Council initiative ‘A Fresh Approach to School Landscapes.’

These awards not only affirm the work we do but reflect the importance others see in the work we do both with the local community and with schools and organisations further afield.

The field adjacent to the school currently makes a huge contribution to the biodiversity we see in our school and the locality, and its destruction would effectively at best muzzle - at worst silence - the work we are able to do. It would isolate our school from surrounding ecologically rich areas and there is nothing in the proposed development that would prevent this isolation. Indeed, the mitigating measures described in the recent ecological survey by Lindsay Carrington Ecological Services lack any scientific credibility. They will not prevent, for example, the destruction of the badgers’ territory. It makes no sense to destroy a natural badger’s sett and build an artificial sett, hoping the badgers will move in. The information I have obtained from the Badger’s Trust suggests that such a strategy is likely to prove unsuccessful. The badger-proof fencing ignores the fact that the badgers, being intelligent creatures, will simply use the public entrances but having done so, will find their own trackways blocked by housing. In this way, the ecosystem becomes unbalanced and the corralling of badgers and hedgehogs will inevitably have a catastrophic effect on the hedgehog population as mentioned above.

The imposition of a housing development of 120 houses would **fundamentally alter the character of one of the last remaining areas in Portchester with a truly rural feel, which significantly contributes to the nature and character of our own site.** The school is currently surrounded by housing on three sides of its site. It is, in fact only open on its eastern boundary, affording south westerly views across to the Harbour and views north to Portsdown Hill. Losing the physical connection with this piece of rural land is impossible to quantify. The loss of this aspect will be felt nonetheless and the school community finds the prospect of being hemmed in completely by dense housing, unacceptable.

IMPACT ON LOCAL NETWORKS, ROADS AND SERVICES

Geographically, Cranleigh Road is on a peninsula – one road in, one road out. It feeds a large housing estate and a growing marina with cafe, light industry, recreation ground and football club. Each of these has contributed to growing pressures on the road system and anecdotal reports from parents (many of whom live in the area under focus) suggest unacceptably high levels of congestion at peak times.

There is ample evidence for the pressure on local roads around the school, not just around the ‘school run’ times but at other times of the day too. As part of their local studies the children have been measuring traffic flows along Cranleigh Road. A survey carried out on 9th February 2015 from 2.30 to 2.40 pm recorded 25 cars and 5 vans – in just 10 minutes (2.5 cars a minute). A comparable survey carried on 22nd January 2016 recorded the following traffic use over a 45 minute period; 119 cars and 19 vans and lorries. This equates to 3 vehicles a minute supporting our impression that the road network around Cranleigh Road (from Wicor Marina and Rec to Hatherley Crescent and White Hart Lane) is already heavily used, even at relatively ‘quiet times’. The additional pressures of on-road parking add to current congestion.

A recent morning traffic survey of Cranleigh Road on 13th January 2016 counted 120 cars, 23 vans, 4 bicycles and one motorbike between 8.00 am and 8.40 am. This figure rises alarmingly when the traffic using Cranleigh combines with White Hart Lane and Cornaway Lane (the route into Cranleigh. In the same time frame the figures rose to 420 cars, 52 vans/lorries 14 bicycles and 5 motorbikes. This figure is even greater around school drop off times.

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Even if we adopt what surely must be a conservative estimate of one car per new household, it is not a credible conclusion that the addition of 120 houses feeding into this already busy road network will not add significantly to traffic problems. **My view is that the potential influx of cars and vans will have a significantly negative impact on congestion, pollution and road safety, the effects of which will be felt throughout the whole of Portchester.** Travel in and out of Portchester is already bad; for example it can take 30 minutes to drive from The Seagull Roundabout to the Delme Arms Viaduct and there is no logic to support a conclusion that travel times and congestion will be unaffected by the addition of 120 houses.

In addition, residents from 120 houses will not only add pressure on the existing traffic infrastructure but will add to already existing pressure on local community services such as doctors' surgeries and schools. Wicor Primary School, adjacent to the proposed development is full and each year group has a waiting list. Last year we received over 90 applications for places in our 2015 intake – our admissions number is 60 and there is no capacity to expand on this. **The projections for September 2016 are that the school will again be heavily oversubscribed;** we have received 121 first and second choice applications – again for 60 places. I am informed that other schools are equally full and surplus places in Portchester are relatively rare. This also raises the point that if local school places are unavailable, then families will need to travel to schools outside the immediate area, adding further to the congestion.

In conclusion, I can see no benefits to our school or the local community from the addition of 120 houses. The proposal is in no way suited to this location. The impacts on wildlife will be hugely detrimental. The knock on effect for the school, as mentioned earlier will be to diminish the teaching and learning experiences we offer our 438 pupils, other schools and the local community. The precious rural feel and character of the area will be destroyed. My understanding is that the new town of Welborne was planned and designed in such a way as to provide enough housing, with an appropriate infra-structure that would negate any excuses for destroying the few remaining green spaces and valuable wildlife habitats in the Borough. It would not be credible, surely, for such a well-planned and carefully thought through project to suddenly fall short in its final stages. Interestingly, the images of the proposed new town show green, open spaces, trees and grassland and clearly wish to portray, ironically, the feeling of wellbeing that the building of 120 houses off Cranleigh Road will destroy.

The time has come for policy makers and elected officials to grasp the planning and development nettle. **Regions cannot expand housing ad infinitum; a point is reached where the quality of life for local communities is degraded with continued development and no accrued benefits.** Recent research findings reported in the national news have highlighted the importance of open, green, natural spaces for the mental health of local communities. I believe Fareham Borough has reached a tipping point and needs to take the brave step of putting the last few unprotected wildlife oases out of harm's way for the perpetuity of its residents. It is not acceptable for local people to have to fight for something so valuable every few years. It is depressing and de-stabilising for everyone concerned, as I have learned in my contact with so many residents who have been left feeling angry or depressed by this latest application.

I hope that my objection will be given serious consideration.

Mark Wildman

Headteacher