

22 January 2019

Friends of Charlton Kings: points for consideration with respect to the local plan

We are grateful for the opportunity to represent our community of Charlton Kings residents (currently 1048 followers via social media). Our mission statement is “protection of the unique and special community that is Charlton Kings, standing for sympathetic, appropriate and sustainable development”.

We have not been engaged by CBC in the development of the local plan, although we were formed back in 2016. We have very limited planning expertise as a group.

Our queries on the soundness of the local plan, which we would respectfully ask be taken into consideration as it is finalised, centre on specific concerns about the process followed to **allocate development to the site at Oakhurst Rise**, although we would query the general process for identifying windfall sites within the plan:

“Positively prepared”:

As residents we think it is reasonable to be consulted on the suitability of land for development prior to its inclusion in the local plan. This has not, universally, been the case with the plan in front of you. There is one instance in Charlton Kings (land off Oakhurst Rise) where current Cheltenham policy precludes development, as gardens and green field sites are determined to be a ‘no infill / no garden grabbing’ area (supplementary guidance to the Cheltenham plan) and Cheltenham policy was to prohibit development of private green space. This parcel of land has been owned by a charity since 1957, is under a long lease to a local primary school, and is in extensive use by county schools as the county’s cross country course. In CBC’s “call for sites” and assessment of availability 2016 – 2017, there is no mention of this site.

(https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/5589/sala_reportpdf.pdf).

Once it became clear that an option had been obtained on the land for development in circa 2016, residents attempted to register the land as a local green space on grounds of local amenity, county amenity, heritage interest and ecological sensitivity. The site has previously been considered for development and in recent decades **has been rejected by the council, the planning inspectorate and was also called into the Secretary of State for the Environment** – and rejected.

The request for a local green space application was not supported by CBC officers, citing a conflicting policy that land allocated to development could not be considered for LGS – no-one knew it had been allocated.

It is unclear whether the full assessment of availability was conducted, not least because the school (as tenants to the land) were at that time unaware that the land was being put up as a windfall site, and the land was transferred to Catholic Church ownership in order to set up a Catholic school; the land is still subject to Charity Commission constraints.

It does appear that a mixed house use assessment was conducted in December 2017 (link below). This analysis was not brought to public attention and was only found as a result of trying to prepare comments for the local plan. It contains factual errors that are surely material to the suitability of the site.

[https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/6182/tabulated_historic_environment_appraisal.pdf].

The heritage assessment **conflates the Grade II* listed building to the south of the proposed site (Ashley Manor) with the Grade II listed building to the west of the site (Charlton Manor)**. And it states that the western part of the **site is screened from the heritage assets by a dense hedge and mature trees**; however the heritage assets are to the south and east; to the east there is no screening or tree line in place and the field is foundational to the setting of Charlton Manor. To the south there is limited screening. A photo is included below.

No challenge to this process or the flawed analysis has been possible.

The presence of sites within the local plan which have not been fully, properly and fairly scrutinised is not reasonable and we would ask that they are either independently re-assessed or removed.

“Justified”:

We would encourage the inspector to challenge why CBC are looking to build on local green spaces, especially those with considerable heritage, ecological and educational utility in the town, or where access is restricted and sustainable transport difficult. Recent experience demonstrates that brownfield sites are being rejected (e.g. the Tim Fry Landrover site in Ewens Farm) which garner significantly more public support, while green sites are being recommended.

Consistent with national policy: the NPPF does not say ‘if not green belt then build’; there is considerable risk that this is how the Cheltenham Plan is being interpreted and any measures to inject some greater sense of balance would be appreciated to protect the nature of the town and its surrounding areas.

In closing, we would ask the inspector to consider a visit to Oakhurst Rise to see the potential restrictions on development first-hand and to illustrate our otherwise inexperienced representation of concerns; or at least to question and challenge how windfall sites came to be represented in the plan. The lack of transparency in the process to agree windfall allocations is a back door route to a green light for future development, without local consultation or a fair wind for objections to be analysed objectively and in detail.

Please ensure that our voices are heard in the finalisation of the local plan, in order to ensure that this plan is genuinely positive, justified and consistent with national ambition.



The boundary between Charlton Manor (grade II listed) and the proposed housing estate off Oakhurst Rise.

Kind regards,

Sally Walker
On behalf of the Friends of Charlton Kings.