

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this appeal. The Borough Council officers have already put together a very comprehensive and detailed report as to why the application would have been refused had it been allowed to go to committee in Cheltenham, and indeed the council and the local residents' group have put forward these same comprehensive and detailed objections to this appeal.

Mindful of the understandable wish to avoid unnecessary repetition, I wanted to highlight just two interrelated points to you today.

1 – Strength of Local Opposition

As well as being personally opposed to this inappropriate development, both I and my fellow local councillor, Louis Savage, as well as Alex Chalk, Cheltenham's MP, are perhaps best placed to highlight the strength of local opposition to this ill-advised scheme. As local councillors, we've dealt with a number of contentious planning applications in our area in the past, but I don't think any have had such widespread opposition as this. These fields are so prominent and visible right across large parts of Cheltenham, and the huge numbers of local residents' objections come from neighbourhoods across town, including many less affluent areas.

Local residents also know best the local roads for example and the unacceptable impact this development will have. Their views are only strengthened by the strongly worded report from Highways – and in my experience as a councillor, I don't think I've ever seen such a powerful objection from Highways.

I won't go into the many concerns over wildlife and ecology, or heritage assets, or flooding and so on, but all these reasons and more, have understandably given rise to such strength of local feeling against these plans.

2 – AONB

Whilst the AONB issue will be a key part of the council's and residents' group's objections to this scheme, I wanted to reiterate just how significant these fields are as part of the AONB. Being part of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be reason enough to throw out this inappropriate application, but I wanted to impress upon you the added significance of these fields in particular – this is not just a prime example of the Cotswolds landscape, but, as I have already said, some of the most prominent and most visible fields in the whole of the AONB, perhaps seen by more people day to day than any others in the whole of the Cotswolds.

Further, Cheltenham prides itself on being the gateway to the Cotswolds, both for local amenity and tourism, and these fields mark the very start of this landscape. In years to come, if the AONB has lost its character and landscape value, it won't be because of major development in the centre, but because of the gradual incremental erosion, field by field, chipping away at edge of the Cotswolds like this.

As I have said, I want to avoid unnecessary repetition so I will leave my remarks there. The council and the local residents' group rule 6 party have put forward a solid case against this inappropriate scheme and Louis, Alex and I support them fully.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak today.

Matt Babbage, Cheltenham Borough Councillor
Louis Savage, Cheltenham Borough Councillor
Alex Chalk MP, Cheltenham

