

Good afternoon.

My name is Sally Walker. I speak as a landowner within the AONB. I was formerly a director at GCHQ and started my career 26 years ago in the close out of the Cold War, watching cows in the field from the former GCHQ offices adjacent to the site! This is a site of some local history with important memories across the community.

Today I represent the views of my family including 3 teenage sons, and my neighbours in that location, without any formal standing other than as a resident. Our ancient woodland (known as Queens Wood, above Ellenborough Park) and higher level pasture is adjacent to the SSSI on Cleeve Common, and the nationally renowned butterfly reserve that is home to some of Britain's rarest invertebrates and floral species. Our direct line of sight, over about 1.5 miles as the crow flies, is to the land currently under review by this inquiry.

We have closely monitored the emerging and now adopted local plan, given the extensive and arguably necessary development that has already happened between Cheltenham and Bishops Cleeve, and around the Cheltenham Race course, all of which is visible from the AONB. We were all strongly supportive of community efforts, led by the Hitchins family, to prevent development of the AONB on the margins of Prestbury village, just half a mile from this site. We did not know that there were representations in the pipeline to develop this parcel of AONB land at that time and represent in the strongest possible terms that AONB land should not be allocated for development outside of normal plan led processes.

This is very visible and prominent portion of land from our perspective. Looking out from the Cotswold Way as it crosses Cleeve Hill, and from other vantage points across the escarpment, this site protects Cheltenham from becoming just another dense urban sprawl on its eastern boundary. It also gives a landing point for our non human residents, including bats invertebrates and birds, as they traverse between the high ground of the Prestbury and Leckhampton SSSI sites.

As a resident of Battledown, we have a couple of additional points to make.

Battledown Hill is clay; and it is covered with unmapped springs that continually fail to feature in planning decisions. This is regrettable for all current and future residents; springs are constantly affecting new development and restoration work across the hill, and flood management is unpredictable with increasing frequency of damaging events both on the hill and affecting those residents in more low lying areas e.g. Hales Road. Residents can and do talk to this during planning consultations but without the ability to fund detailed geological surveys we have found it difficult to land this concern, despite the visible and documented damage (most notably in 2007, but also during every extreme weather event we have experienced since then). Battledown is a planned Victorian development dating from 1864; residents are entirely dependent on an antiquated drainage infrastructure.

Finally, and to reiterate without apology what has already been said, Harp Hill is a fatal accident waiting to happen. The road infrastructure of Charlton Kings was ruled by a planning inspector to be over capacity during a planning inquiry in 1984; there has been no improvement since then, nor is any possible. My children and myself have experienced multiple near misses when walking dogs or cycling on Harp Hill. The gradient is beyond anything accessible to a young or old non car user, let alone anyone with more serious disabilities, and the road is already used as a cut through by traffic to avoid the bottlenecks in Charlton Kings.

Any AONB will always have its boundaries to human development; as I understand it, national planning policy does not give the margins less protection than those areas central to the area in question; please help us protect against the erosion of those boundaries in the Cotswolds. I respectfully ask that you take these policy led views into consideration in rejecting this appeal.