

OAKLEY FARM INQUIRY (6 September 2021)

I speak as a local resident and, as you yourself have said, sir, there is 'a lot of opposition to this scheme'.

Many compelling and cogent objections have already been made to this outline application and for very good reasons. In particular, the Council for the Protection for Rural England (CPRE) and the Friends of Oakley Farm Pastures Slopes (FOFPS) have written most pertinently and eloquently in their comments and objections. I should like to endorse these objections and rather than repeat them all in other terms I should like to summarise my main objections as follows.

The site is a designated Area of Outstanding Beauty. If that entity is to mean anything then the terms 'Area', 'Outstanding', 'Natural' and 'Beauty' need to be properly emphasised and appreciated. There is no justification in replacing here or elsewhere an AONB with a development such as that proposed. Such changes tend to be irreparable.

Although human experts can point to irreversible human damage, wildlife cannot be consulted about the irrevocable loss of their precious natural habitat. The proposal for up to 250 human habitations would inevitably affect wildlife in the area adversely and irreplaceably.

Building up to 250 dwellings on a limited space would do nothing to improve the look of what is in effect an outstandingly attractive piece of countryside within the town and in clear sight of Cheltenham and its Circular walk. The term development itself is a relatively neutral word and others may see the proposal in other terms.

If the development were to be allowed, then there would be yet further and serious traffic congestion on Harp Hill, Greenway Lane and Prior's Road at least. The proposed exit from the estate onto Harp Hill looks utterly inadequate and intrusive and pedestrians on Harp Hill are already remarkably ill-served. Greenway Lane/Harp Hill has already become a

short-cut and 'rat-run' for traffic travelling to and from the A40. The proposed development would only make matters much worse.

Up to 250 new dwellings would add very considerably to pressure on local amenities, such as schools, health centres, doctors, shops, etc. As someone who has lived in Cheltenham from 1974 to 1993 and returned to live in Prestbury from 2010, I object most emphatically to the prospect of up to 250 residential dwellings on the site. One of the significant and regrettable changes we have noticed to the town over time has been the relatively rapid development of urban and suburban sprawl visible both in the town itself and from the escarpment and surrounding hills. This proposed development would remove yet another valued space in what is, and should remain in perpetuity, an area of outstanding natural beauty. Put that term in capitals AONB and it should also have legally protected status which the present application, if approved, could only erode.

If this AONB were to be compromised, then it would set a precedent for others to become similarly at risk.

Any persons, firm or company fortunate enough to purchase or own such a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty should surely have a duty to maintain it as stewards for posterity.

I therefore object to the application on various grounds: environmental, ecological, practical, civic, possibly legal, and aesthetic. I think the appeal should be dismissed and hope that will be your informed decision, sir.

(Duncan Forbes)