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Proposed Winslow Green Development (08/02944/AOP)

I have been approached by a number of my constituents regarding the proposals to develop the disused airfield at Little Horwood. I enclose some of the correspondence I have received on this matter.

My constituents are very concerned about the impact of this development on the local area. I should state at the outset that I do not oppose development in principle. The housing shortage in this country in general, and in the South East in particular, is an incontrovertible fact, and I recognise that some housing development is inevitable and desirable. Moreover, Aylesbury Vale is a designated growth area and we all have a duty to support a constructive approach which both meets housing need and protects our environment. However, the so-called Winslow Green development is not currently part of the Local Development Framework targets and we do not need it. The challenge for policy makers is precisely to ensure that we have sustainable development, i.e. manageable levels of new housing with the required infrastructure to support those levels.

Greenway proposes to build 3,300 houses on the Little Horwood airfield site. As you know, the South East Plan proposed that Aylesbury Vale should accommodate a further 4,400 houses and the Government later modified that figure to a minimum target of 4,700 houses. Crucially, however, the report of the South East Plan's Examination in Public of the Greenway plans was not persuaded significantly to increase the housing allocation in the district and implied that a development of more than 3000 houses in the area would unbalance – and even undermine – the strong focus of development on Aylesbury town which is advocated by the emerging South East Plan. Greenway boldly claims that it can deliver the housing within five years, thereby meeting AVDC's housing shortfall. In the current economic climate, house-building is not proceeding at anything like the 750 houses a year rate that would be necessary to complete Winslow Green within five years.

I am similarly concerned that the Winslow Green development would exceed AVDC's requirement for housing in the area by 1,300 houses and imbalance the supply of housing across the region. It seems to me that the notion of going from a situation of having no

houses in an area to having over three thousand is at best ill-conceived and at worst dangerously unsustainable.

Such imbalance is also borne out by the employment provision in the Winslow Green development. The new office space proposed equates to a massive nearly 50% of all such new development in the district to 2026. This high proportion of office space would skew the economy in Winslow and its environs in favour of those jobs rated B1 in Aylesbury Vale Employment's Land Study. And, indeed, there is no guarantee that the new jobs created would be filled by new residents. A proportion of the new jobs would likely be filled with residents from Aylesbury and Milton Keynes thereby contributing to increased commuting. Again the impact of Winslow Green on the development of the Aylesbury region is relevant since more jobs in that region would inevitably be better placed because of their proximity to London. Aylesbury seems to me to be a more sustainable location for such employment growth in any case and, at the very least, its development should be proportionate to that proposed elsewhere.

I note Greenway's plans to create a new railway station and bus interchange with parking, as well as a relief road. Naturally the County Council is formally to evaluate the transport implications of the proposal. However, Greenway's transport plans rest heavily on the East-West railway for which funding has not yet been secured. A station is useless without train services and I believe Winslow Green should not be given the go-ahead without a guarantee that the East-West railway has the necessary funding. I am also seriously concerned about the additional traffic that will be generated on both the A421 and the A413. Winslow Green does not seem to me to be a sustainable urban extension because it is physically detached from Winslow and such detachment will naturally impose upon a rural area a rise in the level of traffic and congestion much steeper than that in an urban setting.

The application to the District Council by Greenway does appear to be rather premature since such a large-scale development would need to be allocated as a strategic site in the Council's Core Strategy which, as I understand it, will not be published until June at the earliest. It is imperative that such a huge development be considered as part of a wider strategy to meet the growing housing need and not on an ad hoc basis, divorced from other considerations.

Whilst I recognise that some of the objections raised with me by my constituents do not constitute planning matters, such as the effect on house pricing or on the indefinable 'community atmosphere' of the villages affected, there is considerable anger and dismay among residents of both Little Horwood and Great Horwood about the impact of such a huge conurbation on these villages. Many of the people who have written to me are concerned about the impact of the new development on the rural community and point out that the disused airfield cannot accurately be termed a brownfield site. Indeed, it is my understanding that Greenway is erroneously classing the site as 'previously developed land', contrary to the definition of such land in the Planning Policy Statement.

The quality of the representations made to me has been extremely high. Great Horwood Parish Council and the North Bucks Parishes Planning Consortium, in particular, have worked hard to inform and encourage local residents to register their objections. It is never wise to claim that a representation is entirely authoritative or representative. My concern has been to note, study and reflect upon the views expressed to me. This I have done and my conclusions are a faithful reflection of the message I have received. People

have studied the issues and they are, rightly, concerned to achieve a practical fusion of improved housing provision and sustainable growth. It is worth mentioning that Greenway was not granted its application to build an eco-town on the Little Horwood site. Naturally the company must pursue projects according to the commercial imperative and it is entitled to make another speculative application to develop the site. However, its past failure must mean that the Winslow Green plans are even more closely scrutinised.

I should welcome your comments on the points that have been raised by my constituent. Naturally I would like to write to my constituent again and therefore should appreciate an early reply.

John Bercow MP