

Chigwell Parish Council

Officer Executive Summary for Planning Committee

Application reference EPF/1710/25

Site Land East of Hainault Road, Chigwell

Matter before committee Request for an Environmental Impact Assessment screening opinion

Proposal

The applicant seeks a screening opinion for a housing led mixed use development comprising up to 250 dwellings with 50% affordable housing within Use Classes C3 and C2, approximately 1,500 square metres of Class E commercial floorspace, a nursery up to 1,000 square metres excluding parking and associated land, care and retirement living for around 60 to 70 beds up to 7,000 square metres, a new all purpose access from Hainault Road, a sustainable drainage system, and the creation of approximately 30.24 hectares of accessible green space for informal leisure and biodiversity net gain. The land lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

Site and surroundings

The site is open countryside and forms part of a continuous tract of high grade agricultural land. It makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt and to the separation between Chigwell, Grange Hill and Chigwell Row. The landscape is visually exposed with long views across fields and toward nearby settlement edges. The wider setting includes Hainault Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest and the area falls within the Zone of Influence for the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation where recreational pressure and traffic related air quality are established concerns.

Regulatory context

Under the Town and Country Planning Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017 the proposal is a Schedule 2 urban development project. It exceeds the relevant thresholds because it is for more than 150 dwellings and relates to a site area well above 5 hectares. When determining whether Environmental Impact Assessment is required the authority must apply the Schedule 3 selection criteria which address the characteristics of the development, the environmental sensitivity of the location, and the nature and significance of the likely effects.

Assessment overview

On the information available the scale and permanent nature of the development, the sensitive Green Belt location and the proximity to designated sites indicate a realistic prospect of significant environmental effects. The conversion of open high grade farmland to a substantial built settlement with new access works is likely to cause a marked change to landscape character and to the openness of the Green Belt with high visual impact. The proposal would increase population and traffic in an area where the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation and Hainault Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest are vulnerable to recreational disturbance and to nitrogen oxides and nitrogen deposition from road traffic. The introduction of extensive hard surfaces, new paths and water management features requires careful assessment of surface water pathways, water quality, flood risk and water resources in a district recognised for water stress. Construction and operation would affect nearby residents and users of the countryside through noise, dust, lighting and activity and there is a clear need for robust modelling of transport and air quality effects and for demonstration of a deliverable strategy for active travel and public transport. The Environmental Impact Assessment process is the appropriate mechanism to establish a comprehensive baseline, to assess direct, indirect and in combination effects and to secure mitigation, monitoring and adaptive management across biodiversity, landscape, Green Belt openness, transport, air quality, water environment and human health.

Conclusion and recommendation

Having regard to the Schedule 2 thresholds, the Schedule 3 selection criteria, and the site's high environmental sensitivity as open and visually prominent Green Belt that is also high grade farmland, there is a clear likelihood of significant environmental effects. It is recommended that the Parish Council requests the Local Planning Authority to issue a positive screening opinion confirming that a full Environmental Impact Assessment, including any necessary Habitats Regulations Assessment, is required.