

ELVETHAM CHASE

Developer puts scheme in hands of planning inspector after outline plan rejected

A Wates CGI shows how the proposed scheme could look

NEM
6 JUNE 2018

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CONTROVERSIAL plans to build 700 homes on green fields in Fleet are to be decided by a government inspector.

In February, using delegated powers, Hart District Council's planning officers refused a proposal by Wates Developments Ltd to build a "mini-town" before the company's outline application had been put to councillors.

Wates has now appealed and the application will be examined by a government planning

inspector during a four-day public inquiry. A date for this has not yet been decided.

The developer says the 146-acre site in Pale Lane, known as Elvetham Chase, would form a natural second phase to the Elvetham Heath estate.

Its proposal includes up to 700 homes, 280 of which would be affordable, along with a 420-pupil primary school, a pre-school nursery and a country park.

In its appeal statement, Wates highlights an application by Berkeley Homes for 423 homes on fields at Grove Farm and

Netherhouse Copse, between Fleet and Crookham Village, which was rejected by Hart but permitted on appeal.

It states: "Based on the Netherhouse Copse appeal decision in October 2017, it is evident that the relevant development policies are out of date and, as a result, the 'tilted balance' set out in paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework is engaged fully and little weight should be afforded to those policies."

Wates states that the effects of the development would not be severe or lasting on the surround-

ing countryside, and that there would be limited harm on an enclosed site that is not prominent in the immediate setting.

Due to careful design treatment, the developer believes it is considered that less than substantial harm would be caused to the significance of Pale Lane Farmhouse.

It adds that the proposal will not delay Hartland Village, a 1,500-home mini-town planned at the former Pyestock site, which it says "appears to have slipped in any event", leading to a delay in the delivery of around 140 dwellings within the plan period.

Wates says its scheme will also not prejudice the proposal for a new settlement in an area around Winchfield and Murrell Green, "which faces many objections to its delivery and is needed in the next plan period".

It adds: "The appeal site comprises the release of some 32.1 hectares of best, most versatile land that is necessary to meet housing need."

Wates said at the time of refusal: "The council's decision to refuse this sustainable, high quality proposal, delivering an outstanding new community, is simply astonishing."

Hundreds of people objected to the application, along with Fleet Town Council and Elvetham Heath, Hartley Wintney and Winchfield parish councils.

A spokesman for Fleet Town Council said the "isolated" site was too far from the town's main facilities to be deemed an extension.

Elvetham Heath Parish Council stated that a transport assessment lodged with the scheme grossly underestimated the effects an additional 700 homes would have on an area "already under strain".

It warned that the

scheme was another urban extension, which would exacerbate strain on transport and local services.

"The local secondary schools and medical facilities can barely cope with the current level of residents - problems that will be exacerbated by an additional 700 homes," village leaders added.

Campaign group Stop Elvetham Chase Development said the decision in February was "a great day for local democracy" that would "preserve an important green area and local gap between Fleet, Elvetham Heath and Hartley Wintney."