

Comments by Mike Marriage on Behalf of STOP The Warish Hall Development Group for the Uttlesford Local Plan Leadership Group Meeting, 04/10/23

My name Mike Marriage and I'm writing on behalf of the 589 members of the STOP The Warish Hall Development group. Our group was formed in 2021 in opposition to the "Warish Hall Development" in Takeley which proposed a mixed use development around the Ancient Woodland of Prior's Wood, Protected Lane of Warish Hall Road and Smiths Green, which incorporates many listed buildings. The application was refused by the UDC Planning Committee and then dismissed at a subsequent appeal. A second application for a smaller parcel of this land was refused by a second inspector when resubmitted under S62A.

Our group is not opposed to house building generally, or house building in Takeley specifically; what we are opposed to, is house building in this inappropriate and harmful location. We were therefore shocked to see the fields around Prior's Wood, Smiths Green and Jacks Lane now included for development in the emerging Local Plan.

These sites form the rural heart of our village and are highly sensitive to change.

In the recent Takeley Parish Plan Questionnaire, woodland was listed as the most important landscape feature, prioritised by 95% of respondents.

Prior's Wood is by far the most prominent woodland in the Parish, the only others being in remote areas, north of the A120. It can therefore be reasonably assumed that Priors Wood is the most valuable landscape asset to our community. The draft plan proposes built development tight in on three sides of this irreplaceable heritage asset.

To quote the NPPF, para 180:

c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists

To quote the inspector from the Warish Hall Development appeal:

26. ... Bull Field and Maggots form part of the wider open countryside to the north of Takeley and Smiths Green, and are an integral part of the local landscape character. They share their affinity with the countryside. This gives this part of the appeal site a high susceptibility to change..."

He went on:

"27. In my judgement, the development would introduce an urban form of development that would not be sympathetic to the local character and landscape setting..."

Prior's Wood, as an Ancient Woodland, has a value well beyond a simple collection of trees. The harm to it must be assessed beyond just physical damage but also to the setting, tranquility, public enjoyment, light pollution and ecosystem.

Development as proposed would unequivocally damage all of these aspects. A buffer zone as normally mandated for development close to Ancient Woodland is impossible to achieve in the location due to the pinch point at the entrance to the site. This is blatantly contrary to the NPPF.

The proposed extension of Prior's Wood appears bizarre and ill conceived. It results in a C-shaped wood with housing development in the centre of it. This area of development would also break the important link between the wood and the Grade 1 listed Warish Hall.

Furthermore, I would like to highlight that the Weston Homes development currently under construction on the adjacent "7 acres" is in breach of its planning conditions in relation to the protection of Prior's Wood.

Construction and ground works are happening well within the 15m exclusion zone, our group measured it at 8.2m from the tree trunks and approximately 2m from the canopy. The management of the site fails to abide by the Construction Ecological Management Plan (Biodiversity) on a number of measures, including protective fencing and signage. Weston Homes clearly have little interest in protecting what our village holds most dear.

Our group appreciates that housing needs to be built but we respectfully request that these areas, previously rejected for development by UDC and multiple inspectors, are protected. Please help protect the areas that are most important to our community and allow us to retain some sense of being a rural village rather than continuous development sandwiched between two major roads.

I attach a sketch below to show the areas to which I refer, circled in blue. We request that the only development allowed within the blue line is either public open space, recreational, or an extension to Roseacres School.

Yours

Mike Marriage

Takeley Resident and Co-Founder of *STOP The Warish Hall Development*.

