

Public Comments by Mike Marriage on Behalf of STOP The Warish Hall Development Group for the Uttlesford District Council Full Council Meeting, 31/10/23

Good evening.

I'm Mike Marriage and I'm speaking on behalf of the 591 members of STOP The Warish Hall Development group. Our group is not opposed to development generally, or development in Takeley specifically.

Instead the group was formed to protect the rural heart of Takeley, namely the area around the Ancient Woodland of Prior's Wood, the Protected Lane of Warish Hall Road and Smiths Green, which will hopefully soon become a conservation area.

Development on these sites was unanimously refused by UDC's Planning Committee in December 2021 and then dismissed at a subsequent appeal. A further application for a smaller parcel known as "Jacks" was refused by a second inspector when submitted under S62A.

We were therefore shocked to see these sites, which this council has just spent many thousands of pounds defending at appeal, now designated for development in the emerging Local Plan.

Tonight, our group has one simple request, that these areas of land be removed from the Takeley Framework.

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

Given that Prior's Wood is the only prominent woodland in the Parish, it can be reasonably assumed that it is one of, if not 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:

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

The documents before you tonight provide zero evidence of "wholly exceptional reasons" for development in this location.

In fact, the Sustainability Appraisal actually says this of the allocations in Takeley:

... there is not a clear strategic choice to the same extent as is the case for certain other settlements.

The inspector from the Warish Hall Development appeal said that these sites, I quote:

26. ... 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...”

Please don't be fooled by the "Site Development Templates" document before you, which misleadingly promises a minimum 15m buffer around Priors Wood

A 15m buffer is physically impossible given the pinch point to the west of the wood. A new road would have to be build right next to the wood.

It is unarguable that this development would be detrimental to the Ancient Woodland.

No "wholly exceptional reasons" have been given.

These sites are relatively minor in scale and could be removed without compromising the Plan's progress.

Please don't be fobbed off by excuses of "we can fix this later". This is clearly wrong and needs to be fixed before it progresses any further.

Thank you

Mike Marriage
STOP The Warish Hall Development Group (591 members)