

# Comments on planning application no. 6/2023/2418/

## OUTLINE

1. The proposals represent a windfall site in the London Metropolitan Green Belt. I cannot see that this proposed development is “appropriate” in terms of national Green Belt policy, due to its location outside the village envelope. I cannot see there are Very Special Circumstances to justify the development, due to lack of infrastructure, lack of public transportation, and the topography of the site.
2. Welwyn Hatfield Council adopted the Local Plan on 12th October 2023. Although the Council was aware of the developer’s intention to submit a planning application for this site more than a year ago, they have not included it in the Local Plan and neither has it been included in the Northaw and Cuffley Neighbourhood Plan, which would indicate they consider the site unsuitable for development.
3. Policy SP3 “Settlement Strategy and Green Belt Boundaries” states:- “The primary focus of new development will be in and around the two towns of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, where accessibility to strategic transport networks and public transport is good.”
4. Policy SADM 1 “Windfall Development” requires that:- “The development will be accessible to a range of services and facilities by transport modes other than by the car; There will be sufficient infrastructure capacity, either existing or proposed, to support the proposed level of development; Proposals would not result in disproportionate growth, taking into account the position of a settlement within the settlement hierarchy.”
5. In the United Kingdom there is a distinct underinvestment in infrastructure, both nationally and locally, and with the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement being at its highest level in real terms since the end of the Second World War, that isn’t going to change any time soon. The British maxim “If it ain’t broke don’t fix it.” will apply for many years to come, so we will have to put up with utilities creaking under the strain of underinvestment for many years to come. Last month the Water Authority was repairing pipes in Coopers Lane Road. BT Openreach were visiting First Wood Close almost on a weekly basis until recently, and a few years ago there was a loss of pressure in the gas main. All of this is evidence of underinvestment in utilities locally.
6. We don’t have mains drainage at First Wood Wood Close and have to rely on a private sewage treatment plant, which is working at capacity, and would collapse under the strain of having 150 dwellings attached to it.
7. First Wood Close is not adopted by the local authority, which means it will never be gritted by the Highways Authority. Coopers Lane Road is also not gritted by the Highways Authority, so it is rather worrying that a vulnerable community could be stuck in periods of heavy snow, without the ability to get in or out. During periods of heavy snow the residents of First Wood Close are snowed in a day or two longer than neighbouring communities in Potters Bar and surrounding villages. Those of us that don’t have four wheel or front wheel drive vehicles are unable to drive up the slope, and have to park at the top of the slope in order to be able to drive anywhere. During the period of heavy snow in December 2022 I was snowed in for a week. The first time I went out when the snow started to thaw I had a bad fall in the car park, not realising that the car park was like a sheet of ice. These conditions render the proposed site unsuitable for vulnerable retired residents.
8. The nearest bus stop is 0.9 kilometres away. There are no pavements on either side of Coopers Lane Road until you reach Chequers Mead Care Home, and neither is there any street lighting. There is an infrequent bus service, with a maximum of six buses a day in each direction, and curiously, there are only two buses in each direction on Saturdays.
9. I am in my seventieth year, and am therefore in the age group proposed for this development. My peer group is more mobile than our parents’ and grandparents’ generations. I could not possibly live here without a vehicle. The suggestion that this retirement village will be self contained, without the need to leave the site, is naive in the extreme. Even if all the residents

were severely disabled, the topography of the site renders it unsuitable, as Firs Wood Close has a steep gradient, and the gradient becomes even steeper below the lower car park.

10. Most of the residents of Firs Wood Close have to pay service charges for grounds maintenance, sewage treatment, street lighting and management. These amount to almost £1,300 per year, and will increase in line with inflation in March. The proposed development includes proposals for 24 hour care, an electric bus, golf buggies, a gymnasium and swimming pool. Anybody who has an elderly relative will know the enormous difficulty you have getting basic care needs covered by the local authority, and the constant battles you have with them to keep basic needs covered. The service charges of the existing residents would pale into insignificance when the astronomical cost of 24 hour care is taken into account. Clearly, this development is intended for affluent people who can afford private medical care. It would therefore not make much of a contribution to ameliorate bed blocking in local NHS hospitals. There is also a suggestion that there could be a bar and restaurant. Anybody who has been in business will know this is unsustainable unless it is open to non-residents, but First Wood Close, which is unadopted by the Highways Authority, is not built to accommodate the volume of traffic this would generate. Even if this proposal was implemented, where would the cars park?
11. I recently visited one of the retirement villages cited in the design and access statement. Wadswick Green, which is in the Cotswolds, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where many affluent people go to retire. Although I could not gain access to the village itself, as it is a gated community, the community shop beside it is open to non-residents, sells equestrian supplies and a restaurant. When I visited there was a light aircraft beside the shop, which will give an indication of the affluence of the community.
12. I don't think there is any serious intention to develop a retirement village on this site. The site owner wants to get outline planning permission for the site to inflate the land value. He will then sell the site on and at a later stage the new site owner will put in a fresh application in stating the retirement village proposal is unviable, but use the outline planning permission granted to submit a fresh proposal for a traditional housing development, which I think should be rejected for all the reasons given above