



**Hertfordshire County Council
Public Health Service
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Mr M Peacock
Planning, Development Management
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

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Date: 15 December 2015

Dear Mr Peacock,

Re: S6/2015/1342/PP Proposed development at land to the north east of, King George V Playing Fields, Northaw Road East, Cuffley, Hertfordshire, EN6 4RD

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above. This letter provides the Public Health comments in response to the proposed development of up to 121 dwellings as detailed in the associated Planning Statement and Masterplan.

In summary, we are keen to see developments that promote health and wellbeing through high quality design. Building for Life 12 is a government-endorsed industry standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods¹ that upholds public health principles. Guidance from the national Spatial Planning and Health Group² can also be viewed as informative. Overall the proposed development appears – from the submitted documentation – to be well thought through and has the potential to promote good health and wellbeing. However we would bring to your attention comments in relation to:

- Green space – ensuring positive space, not wasted space
- Physical activity – the promotion of physical activity through development design
- Addressing the lifecourse – a development for all ages

Our rationale for these is set out below.

1. Introduction

1.1 Hertfordshire's Public Health priorities were signed off by the County Council's Cabinet and are in the county Public Health Strategy which can be accessed here: <http://www.hertsdirect.org/docs/pdf/p/phstrat.pdf> . There is a collective responsibility across the County Council and its wider partners to achieving the strategy in order to bring significant benefits to our population in terms of increased quality of life and better health. The County Council's public health ambition for Hertfordshire is to see:

- Citizens who enjoy life and are healthy
- Safe and active communities that get on well

¹ http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/Building%20for%20Life%2012_0.pdf

² http://www.spahg.org.uk/?page_id=194

- A strong economy where businesses thrive
- A high quality environment
- People who are able to achieve their potential

1.2 The Public Health Strategy endorses the widely recognised need for a *place-based, whole-system approach* to improving health and reducing health inequalities; this means addressing the complex causes of health inequalities at the community level by improving the places – the physical, built, natural and social environments - in which we live, work, learn and play. This is an approach which aligns well with spatial planning and the principles of sustainable development.

1.3 Spatial planning has a clear and strong influence on healthy choices made by individuals, and evidence suggests that there are a number of issues that impact on physical and mental health.

- Environments which are safe, environmentally sustainable, have good environmental infrastructure to protect against extreme weather events, have good air quality and are not overly exposed to noise nuisances are those which can be regarded as healthy.
- High quality environments i.e. those with good green space, visual amenity, accessibility to services etc, are needed for people to undertake the optional and social activities which contribute so much to physical and mental wellbeing, and community life.

1.4 Building health into our urban environments is a vital step towards delivering longer term improvements in health across the whole of society. This can be as important as investment in medical interventions. By building health into planning we seek to address some of the causes of poor health from the outset.

1.5 The principle of *health inequalities* states that those who are most economically, environmentally and socially disadvantaged are also those more likely to experience poorer health and wellbeing. This is a fundamental concept for any planning that will effect change in these areas.

1.6 All development proposals should consider the following questions, being mindful of health inequalities:

- Will the proposal have a direct impact on health, mental health and wellbeing? *For example, would it cause ill health?*
- Will the proposal have an impact on social, economic and environmental living conditions that would indirectly affect health? *For example, would it affect transport, employment opportunities, green space or climate change?*
- Will the proposal affect an individual's ability to improve their own health and wellbeing? *For example, will it affect their ability to be physically active?*

2 Comments on proposed development

2.3 Cuffley is an affluent village located in the south of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough. Unlike parts of the wider Borough, the locality does not experience significant health inequalities on the basis of ward level health information³. This does not mean they don't exist and there will

³ Health and Wellbeing within Welwyn Hatfield – a comparison by ward.
<http://reports.esd.org.uk/reports/516?oa=E10000015&pa=E07000241%3AAdministrativeWard&a=>

likely be specific health needs generated by the average age of the local population. Meanwhile child and adult obesity is a recognisable challenge.

2.4 Being mindful of this, the Public Health priorities identified in response to the submitted planning application focus on the following key areas.

2.5 **Green space:** Green space, when we get it right, offers economic, social and environmental benefits. Too often, however, ambition is not met by reality, resulting in wasted space – ‘spaces left over after planning’. It is encouraging to see the masterplan and supporting planning statement giving explicit consideration to the greenspace design as an integral part of the proposed development. However, some comments should be taken into consideration:

- Will the green spaces be delineated? Are they clearly public or clearly private? Public spaces need to feel welcoming and accessible, but the problem with many developments is that the space seemingly belongs to no-one. Private outdoor space can be more valuable to residents than a parking space.
- Will the green spaces be engaging, is there clarity of use? For example, what is the purpose of the north open space labelled 8 in the proposed layout? It is not intended as formal play space, does not appear to be well overlooked or visible and risks becoming a wasted space.
- Will the green spaces encourage social engagement and be as permissive and inclusive as possible?
- How accessible are the green open spaces for apartments?
- How will the informal open space labelled 14 on the proposed layout be managed and maintained? Neglected spaces will fall out of use.
- How will green spaces be accessible by the existing Cuffley community – how will the development design encourage and prioritise pedestrian and cycle access for the wider community rather than vehicles?

2.7 **Active Travel and Physical Activity:** The Design & Access Statement clearly demonstrates a vision to improve the local natural environment which, in turn, has the potential to increase recreational use. There is also a clear intention to enhance sports facilities on the local playing field. It would be helpful to understand how the design of the development will enable this vision to be sustained once the physical improvements have been made

- Will it connect footpaths to existing public rights of way, including the cycle network? Will there be a cycle path on site, creating a through-route?
- How will the development encourage active travel (walking and cycling) of its residents to access local amenities? For short, local trips, active travel should be prioritised over vehicle use.
- Will there be appropriate signage for pedestrian/cycle routes towards key local destinations?
- Will the apartment blocks have adequate cycle parking that is safe and secure?
- Will footpaths be wide enough for wheelchairs and pushchairs within the development?

2.6 **On site traffic and parking.** Is the development balanced between vehicles and pedestrians? Vehicle dominance can blight residential areas, and green spaces can often suffer from anti-social parking. How will this development limit vehicle speeds and tackle poor parking choices in order to make it a place for people, not vehicles?

2.7 **Children.** This development is clearly intending to meet the demand for family homes as part of its housing mix. It is really quite important that this development considers the needs of children and young families who may eventually reside there.

- Nationally, there has been a big decline in the amount of outdoor activity by children, whilst we're seeing increasing levels of child obesity. How will this development ensure outdoor play opportunities, particularly child-led free play that is not in a designated space?
- The play strategy for the development is to augment the existing play facilities to the south of the development. Whilst from a formal, team games perspective this is encouraging, it does overlook the nature of informal play insofar as it is outside of the development boundary, not overlooked or visible.
- Observational research has identified that a number of factors influence children's activity on housing estates including proximity to home, accessibility of key destinations, the range of play opportunities and avoidance of traffic. The better a place, the more optional and social activity takes place, and the long it lasts depends on scale, noise, speed of vehicles, landscaping and the transition zone between indoors and outdoors.
- There is a trend across Hertfordshire which is increasingly seeing families and children living in flatted accommodation and small homes that would traditionally not be considered as family homes. The proposed layout implies that apartments and bungalows would be located in the vicinity of the main entrance to the development. Has consideration been given to the needs of families who may occupy these properties, particularly in relation to traffic speeds, parking, accessible and visible open play space?
- Places that are good for children are good for everyone and adult social behaviour follows similar patterns to children's. In essence, there are strong links between urban design and community activity

2.8 **Affordable Housing:** having a good quality home is important to our health and wellbeing, and ensuring accessibility to affordable housing is a priority across the County. Whilst it is encouraging to see the development is proposing 30% affordable housing, what isn't clear is how and where this will be provided. It is, without a doubt, crucial that the development provides its affordable housing in a way which is integrated and avoids demarcation. It should also have equal access to the green space provided. Examples of poor development design and for lack of community integration do highlight the need to avoid the creation of artificial divides when it comes to housing mix.

- Locating affordable housing within one area has the potential to create a social divide within the development community.

2.9 **A development for all ages:** Socio-economic conditions throughout the life course shape adult health and disease risk. The lifecourse approach as a framework stresses the importance of all ages and stages of life. In the context of the development, a lifecourse approach means assessing how it will benefit and promote better wellbeing at different stages of life – childhood, young adults, young families, working adults, older adults – and the very different needs they may have.

We would be happy to discuss this any part of this response further.

Yours sincerely,

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