

### **Parish Council DPD Submission - COL002, Poplar Farm**

Cold Ash Parish Council (CAPC) **objects** to this site being included in the DPD. CAPC argues that in regard to this site the DPD is **not sound**. The reason the DPD is not sound is that West Berkshire Council (WBC) has been *inconsistent in its judgment of the merits and/or demerits* of this site when compared to similar sites in the immediate vicinity.

#### **Landscape**

In WBC's assessment of THA011 (which is within 400 yards of COL002) it is stated that THA011 is not suitable in Landscape terms, and "that sites within or within the setting of the AONB are to be given "Considerable" landscape weight when assessing sites for development". The LCA (2015) for this site has concluded "that development on the whole of this site would result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. Cold Ash is an AONB settlement and although it has expanded southwards out of the AONB and down the slope towards Thatcham, it retains a distinctive separate identity". COL002 is closer to the AONB; indeed it is located between THA011 and the AONB.

The existing access to the site is along a single lane track with houses either side. To enable the development of the site a separate road would have to be driven through the field to the south. This would further degrade the AONB settlement landscape value. The proposed alternative access through the Strouds Meadow estate is considered unacceptable due to road width and deterioration of amenity to existing residents. We consider that the building would encroach into the buffer zone, to the west of the site, between Cold Ash and the hamlet of Ashmore Green.

The general countryside surrounding Cold Ash is of high quality landscape value with many ancient hedgerows and woods, with numerous old farmsteads. The infilling by housing and loss of these features of the West Berks countryside would do immense harm to the rural character of Cold Ash. In the Parish Plan the residents have specifically stated that it is their primary wish that they retain this aspect of the village and broader Parish.

#### **Flooding**

The judgment of WBC assessors is questionable when this site's flooding risk is compared to other sites that have been excluded from the DPD for this reason. WBC acknowledges that there is a flooding risk. They suggest SuDS have to be built on the site.... "it is acknowledged that the site and adjacent properties to the east and south along Cold Ash Hill are susceptible to surface water flooding...so safe flow routes would have to be provided through the site as part of any development". We consider that the use of the word "susceptible" understates the risk as the flow of surface water and the underlying rapid saturation of the sub-soil (clay deposits with interspersed shingle deposits) occur in varying intensities whenever there is rainfall.

Cold Ash Parish Council opposes this site's inclusion in the list of "Preferred Sites" for the West Berks DPD, on the basis that the site is an unsound choice for the reason of flooding risk. There has been severe flooding in and around this site in recent years. Additional housing on the Cold Ash Hill slopes will serve to exacerbate surface water flows into existing housing adjacent to and downhill of the site and to the larger settlement of North Thatcham. The proposed site sits astride a gully, or fold in the land and is in the direct path of surface water from further upslope.

Substantial and very expensive flood defenses have been constructed to capture surface water flows to the east of Cold Ash Hill (the opposite side of the road from COL002) to protect North Thatcham, This proposed development will require localized SuDS and a retention pond, together with funding for a minimum period of 50 years. Additionally there will be a need for flood defences to be constructed and maintained and in the fields to the south to protect the large number of existing homes in North Thatcham and Southend.

### **Transport**

There is no proposal in the DPD to improve public transport. Indeed in the current round of WBC budget cuts it is proposed that local bus services be cut. The Cold Ash bus service is intermittent at two hours intervals. A further cut will increase the already heavy dependency upon cars. The DPD does not allow for a modal-shift from the use of cars to public transport or bicycles in the Parish. Cold Ash Hill is already heavily used as a rat run in both directions through Cold Ash to the A34 and M4 and return. For the safety of residents exiting the proposed development, a substantial roundabout would have to be built to slow traffic and allow egress from the site.

### **Heritage Assets**

There is a Grade 2 farmhouse on the site, one of the historic buildings in the Parish, which would be overwhelmed by any development of modern housing.

### **Infrastructure**

There is no provision for improvements in the infrastructure in and around Cold Ash. The existing primary school is at capacity, as is the local Kennet Secondary School. The nearest doctor's surgery is already overloaded. The local road system is extremely busy, impacting the rural nature of Cold Ash, therefore even the smallest of increase in the number of houses will have an adverse impact unless WBC can implement some improvement in the local infrastructure.

### **Conclusion**

For the above reasons, Cold Ash Parish Council finds that in relation to this site the DPD is not sound and asks for this site to be removed from the document.