

Sustainability issues raised by Planning Inspectors examining stand-alone sites elsewhere in England

Monks Wood is a new town of up to 8,000 homes¹ proposed by a rural land owner in Pattiswick, near Coggeshall. Here we look at new settlements with similarities to Monks Wood which have been rejected elsewhere in the country in 2018.



Fig 2. Monks Wood location

Although two new settlements were given the go-ahead in the South Cambridgeshire Plan² last month, this was only because Cambridge, unlike Braintree, is constrained by Green Belt. The inspector, however, agreed with the council that sustainable urban extensions were the best strategy noting: *“the sustainability benefits of sites on the edge of Cambridge particularly in relation to sustainable transport nodes”*

Issue 1: Visual impact

In the same South Cambridgeshire report, the inspector rejected a site, Harborne, for reasons which apply equally to Monks Wood. Para 78: *“...the site is in an elevated position which is part of an attractive open and rolling landscape. Development on the site would be highly visible when viewed from surrounding roads and villages. Even with the incorporation of open space, landscaping and other mitigation measures, development on the scale proposed on this site would have significant adverse impact on the attractive rural landscape.”*

¹ Possibly as many as 15,000-homes, as set out in original proposal

² <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/12102/south-cambs-report-final.pdf>



Issue 2: Not a sustainable location in transport terms

Monks Wood is at a very unsustainable location, being at a distance from towns and jobs, and with no public transport. It is accessed by narrow country lanes, including a protected lane which is designated as one of two main access routes to the new town, and located on the over-capacity and dangerous A120.

LODGE FARM GARDEN VILLAGE

This is what the inspector said about a smaller, but similar location site known as Lodge Farm Garden Village in Rugby's Local Plan³, when asking Rugby to delete the garden village from the Plan:

“Paragraph 34 of NPPF expects plans to ensure that developments which generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised. Even if the new village could viably support a new bus service and cycle route into Rugby, the distance and journey times to both Rugby and Coventry by either of these modes or a combination of them would be unlikely to encourage their use. Whilst some day to day journeys to the local shops, surgery and primary school could be made on foot within the village, trips to secondary school, employment locations and main shopping and leisure destinations off-site would be largely car dependent.

As such, I am not persuaded it is a location which could be made sustainable in transport terms. Whilst paragraph 34 also notes that account needs to be taken of policies for rural areas, the emphasis in paragraph 55 of the NPPF is that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. It is not apparent that Lodge Farm would support existing surrounding rural communities to any significant extent, since its local facilities would be scaled to serve the needs of the new community.”

³ <https://andrewlainton.wordpress.com/2018/05/17/rugby-inspector-deletes-isolated-lodge-farm-garden-village/>



CLIFFE WOODS

Cliffe Woods is a planned garden village (with shops, school etc.). It has around 2,700 residents and one bus route to the Medway town with two services between 7 and 8 am. A planning application to expand by 222 houses has just been refused on a recovered appeal⁴.

“The Secretary of State notes that the site is located close to the village of Cliffe Woods which has a range of shops, services and community facilities (IR101). He agrees with the Inspector (IR109) that residents are likely to travel further afield for larger food supermarkets, specialist shops, leisure, employment, and secondary schools, and that this is likely to generate trips by car.

The Secretary of State has carefully considered the Inspector’s analysis of available public transport (IR102-104). He has taken into account that bus services do not operate in the very early morning or after early evening, that cycling is not a realistic option for most or an attractive option, and that the nearest train station is 2km away.

...He has further taken into account the proposals to improve accessibility of the scheme (IR105-7), and whilst he agrees that the proposed measures will go some way to facilitating sustainable travel modes, given the uncertainty around the operation of the ‘Arriva Click’ service (IR106) he gives these measures limited weight.

...in the Secretary of State’s judgement, the proposed development does not limit the need to travel or offer a genuine choice of transport modes, and is therefore in conflict with the Framework’s policy on promoting sustainable transport (paragraph 103 of the Framework). His concerns are not overcome by the proposed mitigation.”

Issue 3: Harm to the intrinsic beauty of the countryside

As at Lodge Farm, Pattiswick is a hamlet in a beautiful rural area, with listed buildings and protected woodlands and 2nd world war sites. Under previous categorisation it was labelled a Special Landscape Area but is still designated as a Landscape Character Area by BDC (ECC Place Services Report January 2013). The inspector rejected Lodge Farm for just these reasons: *“Lodge Farm is also located in the countryside, within the Leam and Rainsbrook Valleys. Although not subject to a*

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/754676/18-11-08_DL_IR_Town_Road_3175461.pdf



national or local designation, the landscape surrounding the site is open and attractive, visible from the surrounding valley sides including the Rainsbrook escarpment, and contains many historic features, including both designated and non-designated heritage assets. The area also has a distinctive settlement pattern, characterised by small scale villages and hamlets. It is a core planning principle in paragraph 17 of the NPPF that account should be taken of the intrinsic beauty and character of the countryside. The development of a new settlement of 1,500 dwellings in this setting, even with the inclusion of landscaping and green space, would cause significant harm to the intrinsic beauty and character of the countryside in this part of the borough.”

CLIFFE WOODS

In the Cliff Woods case, the Secretary of State found that, *“the appeal scheme would inevitably adversely affect the currently open and rural character of the landscape, and...[in terms of Policy BNE25(i)] would not maintain or enhance the character, amenity and functioning of the countryside.”*

Issue 4: Significant views of new buildings from multiple viewpoints

At Drake Park Garden Village⁵, Surrey, the Secretary of State found that the scheme would have a *“significant impact”* on the visual appreciation of green belt openness and create *“significant” views of new buildings from multiple viewpoints outside the site.”*

⁵ <https://www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1465917/surrey-green-belt-garden-village-blocked-new-secretary-state>