



Context Planning Ltd
Cambridge House
Henry Street
Bath
BA1 1BT

tessa@contextplanning.co.uk

Office Tel: 01225 251758

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Dear Charmian Eyre-Walker

Ref: P25/01760/O

Site Address: Land North of London Road and South And East Of Webbs Heath South Gloucestershire

- 1.1. Context Planning Ltd have been instructed by Siston Parish Council to prepare a representation to planning application reference (P25/1760/O ('the application') which will have direct and significant impacts upon the residents of Siston Parish and the wider community.
- 1.2. The application seeks outline planning permission (with access as a reserved matter) for the construction of a mixed-use development, comprising up to 950 new homes including 75 units of specialist elderly accommodation, community infrastructure, a mixed-use hub, mobility hubs, the laying out of green infrastructure and open space, the creation of a new means of access onto the A420 London Road and Webbs Heath, pedestrian and cycle connections to Warmley Community Forest and off-site improvements, new drainage infrastructure, and associated earthworks ('the development').
- 1.3. The site is within the Bristol/Bath Green Belt and outside of any defined housing development boundary. The site comprises a locally listed building and is also close to a number of listed buildings and the Siston Conservation Area. At the eastern boundary, the site sits adjacent to Webbs Heath Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI).

- 1.4. Upon review of the current proposals, it is evident that the scheme raises a number of significant planning issues, and conflicts with local and national policy, that would warrant refusal of the application. Each main issue is taken in turn below.

Principle of Development

- 1.5. Core Strategy policy CS5 (Location of Development) sets out the overall direction for where development should occur across South Gloucestershire. It generally directs development to within settlement boundaries, which are considered the most sustainable locations. Policy PSP40 sets out acceptable forms of residential development in the open countryside, outside of the settlement boundaries.
- 1.6. Regarding the Green Belt, Policy CS5 explains that major development should be focused in existing urban areas and defined rural settlements. It explains that other proposals within the Green Belt must comply with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which outlines what constitutes “appropriate” development’.
- 1.7. Policy PSP7 (Development in the Green Belt) of the Policies, Site and Place Plan (PSPP) provides more detailed criteria on development in the Green Belt, and this echoes the advice provided in the Framework.
- 1.8. The application site is not currently allocated for development, is located outside of any defined development boundary and is located within the designated Bath/Bristol Green Belt. The development is therefore contrary to policies CS5, PSP7 and PSP40 as well as key policies within the NPPF.
- 1.9. The application recognises that the application site is not currently identified for development and accepts that the development would represent a departure from the Development Plan. However, the submission argues that the current Local Plan is ‘out of date’, but no further detailed analysis has been provided on this matter, such as the weight that should be given to the out of date policies.
- 1.10. It is accepted that the Council are unable to demonstrate a 5 year deliverable supply of housing, and as such the housing constraint policies are considered ‘out of date’. However, the Framework does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision-making. The fact that policies are ‘out of date’ does not

mean they should be disregarded or carry no weight. Importantly the Development Plan Green Belt policies are fully compliant with the NPPF and must be given full weight.

- 1.11. The applicant's argument for the development appears to be founded on the fact that the site forms the majority part of a proposed 'North Warmley New Neighbourhood' allocation within the Regulation 19 Plan (Policy LP8). No explanation has been provided as to why this emerging policy has been given significant weight. Their reliance on this policy is overplayed and unfounded.
- 1.12. At this stage no weight should be given to Policy LP8 of the Reg 19 Plan. The land remains unallocated and within the Green Belt. Para 57 of the NPPF explains that weight can only be afforded to emerging policies having regard to:
 - *Stage of preparation* - Whilst the plan has reached Regulation 19 stage, it has not yet been submitted for Examination or tested for soundness. It therefore remains at a draft stage only.
 - *Extent of unresolved objections* - The relevant policy is subject to a significant number of unresolved objections. This substantially reduces the weight that can reasonably be attached.
 - *Consistency with the NPPF* - The policy in question is not compliant with the NPPF. Exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated to allow the release of this land from the Green Belt. The development of this site would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 1.13. Given these factors, the emerging policy cannot be afforded any weight. The inclusion of policy LP8, and removal of land from the Green Belt, will be rigorously contested at any future Examination. The statutory starting point therefore remains the adopted Development Plan, against which the application should be assessed. Reliance on an untested, unresolved and non NPPF compliant emerging policy is contrary to the principle of plan-led development.
- 1.14. Therefore, of fundamental importance in the determination of the application, is the location of the site within the Green Belt. Paragraph 153 of the Framework explains that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness.

Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

- 1.15. Paragraphs 154 and 155 of the NPPF set out a closed list of exceptions to inappropriate development within the Green Belt. The application fails to provide any assessment against these provisions, nor does it identify which specific exception it purports to meet. In the absence of such justification, it must be concluded that the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Furthermore, the applicant has not advanced any “very special circumstances” that would be required to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, and in our view, none exist. As such, the application cannot be supported in principle and should be refused.
- 1.16. Whilst the applicant asserts that the site qualifies as ‘grey belt’ land under the NPPF, this claim is based solely on the Stage 2 Green Belt Assessment (Arup, January 2025), which forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan Part 2. This document has not yet been submitted for Examination and therefore remains untested. Beyond referencing this report, the applicant provides no substantive explanation or analysis to demonstrate how the site meets the definition of grey belt land. Moreover, there is no assessment under paragraph 155 of the Framework to show compliance with the relevant exception to inappropriate development.
- 1.17. The submission itself acknowledges that the proposal is not reliant on the site being classified as grey belt, and confirms that the applicant has not engaged with the provisions of paragraph 155. In particular, the proposal fails to meet the ‘golden rule’ requirement of delivering at least 50% affordable housing, offering instead a scheme aligned with the draft allocation’s requirement of 30%. Therefore, even if the site were considered grey belt, which we do not accept, the proposal would still fail to meet the criteria set out in paragraph 155 and would remain inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 1.18. For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, ‘grey belt’ is defined as *‘land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.*

'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development'.

The three of the five purposes of green belt mentioned within the definition are:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

- 1.19. A Stage 1 Strategic Green Belt Assessment, commissioned by the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and produced by LUC in November 2021, was designed to provide a proportionate, objective, transparent, and consistent evaluation of the Green Belt's strategic role across the WECA authorities. Despite the subsequent withdrawal of the WECA Spatial Development Strategy, the constituent authorities have confirmed that the Stage 1 assessment remains valid and forms part of the evidence base for the emerging South Gloucestershire Local Plan. Its methodology and conclusions continue to carry weight in informing decisions about the future of Green Belt land.
- 1.20. A Stage 2 Green Belt Review was later produced by Arup in January 2025. This document serves as a secondary refinement of the Stage 1 assessment, applying the same basic criteria to a finer grain of geography through site-specific analysis. It is explicitly acknowledged within the Stage 2 report that it does not function as a policy or decision-making document and cannot, in isolation, determine whether areas of Green Belt should be released for development. Its role is limited to informing the evidence base and supporting further consideration.
- 1.21. However, surprisingly there is a marked and concerning divergence between the conclusions of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessments, particularly in relation to the HELAA sites on the Bristol East Fringe. The Stage 1 assessment concluded that most Green Belt land adjacent to Bristol and Bath, including the East Fringe, makes a significant contribution to Purpose a) of the Green Belt (preventing urban sprawl by maintaining openness and separation from urban areas.). This conclusion was based on the clear physical distinction between urban and rural land, and the strategic importance of maintaining that separation.

- 1.22. In contrast, the Stage 2 Review uniformly assesses all HELAA sites on the Bristol East Fringe as making only a moderate contribution to Green Belt purposes. This shift in evaluation is not adequately justified and appears to result from altered interpretations of the assessment criteria, rather than a consistent application of the Stage 1 methodology. While some variation in scoring is expected due to increased granularity, the systematic downgrading of all sites in this area is inconsistent with the stated methodological aims and undermines the integrity of the evidence base. The Stage 2 study introduces new interpretations that, in some cases, produce entirely different conclusions from those reached in Stage 1, despite assessing the same parcels of land.
- 1.23. This discrepancy is particularly problematic given the strategic importance of the Bristol East Fringe in maintaining the openness and containment of the Bristol urban area. The Stage 1 assessment clearly identified this area as making a significant contribution to Green Belt purposes, and no compelling evidence has been presented to justify the wholesale reclassification of these sites. The uniform finding in Stage 2 that all HELAA sites now make only a moderate contribution lacks transparency and appears to be driven by development pressure rather than objective analysis.
- 1.24. It is our view, based on the available evidence, that the majority of sites on the Bristol East Fringe, including this application site, continue to make a significant contribution to the Green Belt. The release of individual sites would result in substantial harm to the openness and function of the Green Belt. More critically, the cumulative release of multiple sites in this area would lead to major strategic erosion of the Green Belt, undermining its role in containing urban expansion and protecting the setting of Bristol.
- 1.25. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on Green Belts provides guidance on how to assess the strength of contribution to purpose (a), along with the other purposes. The PPG advises that areas making a strong contribution are likely to be free from existing development, and lack physical features in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development. The PPG continues that such areas are also likely to include all of the following features:
 - Be adjacent or near to a large built-up area;

- If developed, result in an incongruous pattern of development (such as an extended "finger" of development into the Green Belt).

1.26. Applying this guidance to the application site, it is evident that the land plays a strong role in fulfilling purpose (a). The site comprises a large expanse of agricultural land, largely free from built development. While there is some sporadic development in the vicinity and a small part of the site is bounded by woodland, the overall parcel lacks physical containment and features that would limit the spread of development. Its openness and undeveloped character contribute meaningfully to the separation between the urban edge and the wider countryside.

1.27. The site is directly adjacent to the built-up area of Bristol. The proposed development, by virtue of its scale and location, would read as a clear and substantial expansion and sprawl of the urban area into the Green Belt. The absence of surrounding development and the presence of a well-defined urban edge mean that the proposal due to its siting and excessive scale would result in a visually and spatially incongruous pattern of development. It would appear as an extended wedge of urbanisation projecting into the Green Belt, precisely the type of encroachment that purpose (a) seeks to prevent. The impact is clear from the applicant's own LVIA. An example of a view of the site from across Bristol is provided at Figure 1 below.



Figure 1 – Viewpoint 20 (Hanham Hills) - LVIA

1.28. It therefore must be concluded that the site makes a strong contribution to purpose (a) of the Green Belt. The development cannot therefore be defined as 'grey belt'. The development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The applicant has not provided any explanation to contradict this, and no very special circumstances have been

provided. For the avoidance of doubt, the draft allocation would not represent very special circumstances as no weight should be given to this, at this time. The applicant advises that any harm to the Green Belt would not constitute a strong reason for refusal. However, this position is not justified, particularly given the Framework's advice that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness.

- 1.29. If the application is to be recommended for approval it must be referred to the Secretary of State under the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2024. This is because it is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and residential development of over 1000m² floorspace, and would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

Highway safety/highway capacity

- 1.30. There are significant concerns regarding highway safety, network capacity, access arrangements, pedestrian and public transport connectivity, and the unsustainable reliance on private vehicles. The application fails to demonstrate that the development can be safely and sustainably accommodated within the existing and proposed transport network.
- 1.31. The applicant places considerable weight on the draft Regulation 19 allocation. However, the transport implications of delivering 950 dwellings in this sensitive location have not yet been scrutinised through the Local Plan Examination process, and as such, no weight can be afforded to this draft allocation. Notwithstanding the fact weight cannot be given to this policy, it is clear that development on the North Warmley sites will only be acceptable if it provides or contributes towards a comprehensive suite of off-site transport and highways improvements, including contributions towards the Strategic Transport Package, the Ring Road Transport Package, and enhancements to local bus services.
- 1.32. The applicant's Transport Assessment (TA) acknowledges that South Gloucestershire Council is commissioning work to 'reimagine' the Ring Road to deliver bus priority and other sustainable transport interventions, and that new bus services will be developed to connect with the Metrobus network and wider transport network. However, these are long-term aspirations with no deliverables at present, and there is no binding commitment to

fund or implement them. Without secured mitigation, the development would result in severe impacts to both the local and strategic road network. Roads such as Warmley High Street, Siston Hill, and Webbs Heath Road already experience congestion, safety concerns, and air quality issues, which would be significantly worsened by the addition of 950 dwellings.

- 1.33. The application underplays the reliance of future residents on private cars. Modest improvements to walking and cycling routes and limited bus service enhancements are unlikely to induce a meaningful modal shift. The TA identifies that the development would generate 932 two-way person trips in the AM peak, 761 in the PM peak, and 6,564 over a 12-hour period. The TA has adjusted this for the Travel to Work modal split, which equates to 466 two-way vehicle trips in the AM peak, 381 in the PM peak, and 3,282 over the day. The TA's assumption of a 25.6% reduction based on aspirational modal shift targets lacks empirical support and is unlikely to be achieved, particularly given the fragmented pedestrian and cycle connectivity, poor amenity for walking in dark or inclement conditions, and the site's distance from essential services. The figure of 3,282 additional two-way vehicle trips, across the 12 hour period is therefore likely to be a significant underestimate.
- 1.34. The site is located away from essential services, including schools, healthcare, supermarkets, and employment centres. The nearest local centre is over 1.5 km away, and walking routes are indirect and poorly connected. These conditions will reinforce car dependency, contrary to the Council's sustainability objectives, and will increase traffic on already congested corridors. Public transport provision is limited, with existing bus services infrequent and lacking direct access to key destinations. Proposed service extensions, including the informal proposal to extend Service 43 into the site, remain unsecured and could adversely impact existing users by adding to the length of the route, reducing the frequency of the service.
- 1.35. The development proposes three vehicular access points, two of which are on Webbs Heath, a narrow rural lane with poor visibility, limited capacity, and minimal pedestrian infrastructure. The Road Safety Audit highlights concerns with regards to the accesses on Webbs Heath, particularly with regards to the rural nature of the lane, and the impact of hedgerows etc on visibility. The assumption that reducing the speed limit from 40mph to

30mph will mitigate risk has not been fully justified. The proposed A420 roundabout is misaligned with the existing carriageway, creating a hazardous approach, and the Road Safety Audit picks up on this poor alignment. Given the number of vehicles that would be using these junctions, as well as the large number on the existing road network, these matters must be dealt with now rather than left to detailed design stages.

- 1.36. The TA identifies 17 personal injury collisions in the vicinity over five years, including three serious incidents at junctions such as the A420/A4175 double mini roundabout. The introduction of substantial additional traffic is likely to increase the risk of collisions. The site's trip generation, coupled with inadequate mitigation and the high likelihood of car dependency, would result in severe residual impacts on both local and strategic roads.
- 1.37. Overall, the development is likely to have a severe impact on the highway network and a significant adverse effect on highway safety. It therefore conflicts with paragraph 115 and 116 of the NPPF.

Lack of supporting infrastructure

- 1.38. Alongside the lack of highway infrastructure, there are significant concerns regarding the absence of local infrastructure to support the additional population. The development would generate an estimated 2,280 new residents, placing substantial pressure on existing schools, healthcare facilities, and community services. The Parish Council does not consider that the application has demonstrated that the necessary infrastructure can be delivered in a timely manner, if at all. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan submitted in support of the application does not provide sufficient reassurance that essential facilities will be available to meet demand arising from early phases of development.
- 1.39. Education provision is a particular concern. No tangible evidence has been provided to demonstrate that local schools have capacity to accommodate the additional pupils generated by the development. The nearest primary school, St Barnabas C of E Primary School, is a single-form entry school located around a 25-minute walk from the site, far beyond the desirable walking distance. Using South Gloucestershire Council's default pupil yield of 36 primary pupils per 100 dwellings, the development would generate approximately 342 primary-age children, more than double the capacity of St Barnabas.

No evidence has been provided to demonstrate that this, or any nearby primary school, could be expanded to meet demand. A two-form entry expansion of St Barnabas would require significant development on a constrained site, almost certainly resulting in the unacceptable loss of playing fields which would be contrary to adopted policy.

- 1.40. Using the Council's standard yield of 18 secondary pupils per 100 dwellings, the scheme would generate around 171 secondary pupils, or approximately 34 pupils per year group. Again, no evidence has been provided that nearby secondary schools can accommodate this additional demand, nor that physical expansion is feasible. In terms of early years provision, the application proposes on-site facilities but only in phases 3 or 4. This would be too late to meet the needs of families occupying earlier phases, and risks leaving provision unaddressed for many years.
- 1.41. Healthcare provision is also inadequate. The NHS has confirmed that there is insufficient primary healthcare capacity locally and has requested a mitigation contribution of £965,299 towards capital costs of additional primary care floorspace. They identify that nearby GP practices, including Cadbury Heath Centre, would be operating at only 45% of the required floorspace once this development is built out. No evidence has been provided that these centres can be expanded to accommodate growth, raising serious concerns about delivery.
- 1.42. The proposed mixed-use hub is presented as a benefit of the scheme, but its content is vague and its delivery uncertain. The application does not clearly define the uses proposed, nor demonstrate that they would complement rather than compete with the existing nearby centres. The submission further advises that delivery of the hub would not occur until phases 3 or 4, raising a significant risk that it will not come forward at all. In its current form, the proposal does not represent a true mixed-use development and would provide only limited employment opportunities. The emerging allocation policy envisages at least 600m² of employment space, including small low-cost workspaces, a convenience store, nursery, and café-type outlet. None of these commitments are secured in the present application.
- 1.43. The scheme also proposes 30% affordable housing, incorrectly citing this as a local plan requirement. In fact, Policy CS18 of the adopted Core Strategy requires 35% affordable

housing on qualifying sites, subject to viability. The proposal is therefore in direct conflict with CS18. It would appear that the applicant is basing their affordable housing requirement on a draft policy that can be given no weight at this stage.

- 1.44. Taken together, the development fails to demonstrate that sufficient infrastructure for education, healthcare, or community services can be provided in a timely and deliverable way. It also fails to meet adopted affordable housing policy. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies CS6, CS18, and CS23 of the South Gloucestershire Core Strategy as well as paragraphs 56–59 of the NPPF and associated Planning Practice Guidance.

Character and appearance/heritage

- 1.45. Core Strategy policy CS1 requires high-quality design that respects and enhances the character, distinctiveness and landscape of its context. Policy CS9 seeks to conserve and enhance environmental quality and heritage. Policy PSP1 requires proposals to respond to local distinctiveness to conserve and where appropriate enhance landscape character, including hedgerows, trees, skylines and tranquillity. PSP2 and PSP17 seeks to conserve heritage assets and their settings proportionate to their significance.
- 1.46. The proposal irrevocably changes the character of Siston Parish. A development, of such magnitude in this sensitive location, would introduce clearly perceptible change at a series of high-sensitivity receptors in the immediate surroundings. This is clearly illustrated in the applicant's own Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).
- 1.47. There is no clear explanation of the chosen viewpoints from which the Accurate Visual Representations (AVRs) are taken. The LVIA documents refer to a number of site context photographs (1-24) but these do not appear to have been provided, and there is no plan to show from where these photographs were taken. Without this information, it is difficult to make an informed judgment on the impacts and the LVIA can not be relied upon. There are concerns that the sensitivities of the site and the impacts have been downplayed.
- 1.48. A selection of these viewpoints discussed in the LVIA have progressed to AVRs but there is no clear explanation of why these were chosen, and others were not included. Whilst these AVRs were from locations where there was considered to be at least a 'moderate impact', other viewpoints were also marked in this category.

- 1.49. It is important to note, important viewpoints, including those from Siston Conservation Area have not been included. Whilst the Heritage Statement explains that views would be filtered due to intervening trees, this has not been properly demonstrated. The applicant has not provided a dedicated photomontage from within Siston Conservation Area. The LVIA refers only in passing to receptors “within the north-eastern extent”. That is an evidential gap that risks under-representing how the scheme would be perceived from the core viewpoints of the Conservation Area.
- 1.50. Siston Conservation Area derives its special interest from the relationship between Grade I listed Siston Court, its designed landscape and the dispersed properties within a predominantly rural and undulating valley setting. The Conservation Area boundary generally follows existing field hedges linking the high points of the surrounding landscape, reflecting the importance of landscape setting and views. The Siston Brook Valley is characterised by gently undulating landform, a strong framework of hedgerows, copses and small woodlands, and small to medium irregular fields. The variety afforded by dips and hollows, hedgerows and trees is integral to the area’s rural character, tranquillity and sense of remoteness; measures that promote uniformity, such as loss of hedgerows or engineered platforms, would diminish that character. Landform and planting combine to enclose views and screen encroaching suburban development; it is therefore essential to retain the surrounding rural and undeveloped landscape to protect the setting and key views to and from Siston Court and associated historic buildings.
- 1.51. The AVR’s aid to demonstrate the landscape harm that would be caused by the development, even post mitigation. Warmley Forest Park would be affected at near-edge locations which are well used by the public. Cut-and-fill platforms and the resultant roofscape would be seen above and through trees on the valley side, altering the immediate setting of the Siston Brook valley slopes and interrupting the vegetated skyline.



Figure 2 - View point 3 - View south-east from PRoW PSN/49, at the northern edge of Warmley Forest Park

1.52. From Webbs's Heath the proposed development will be visible above and between the existing field boundary vegetation, replacing views of the undeveloped, east-facing slopes with the proposed built form, resulting in a major change in landscape character.

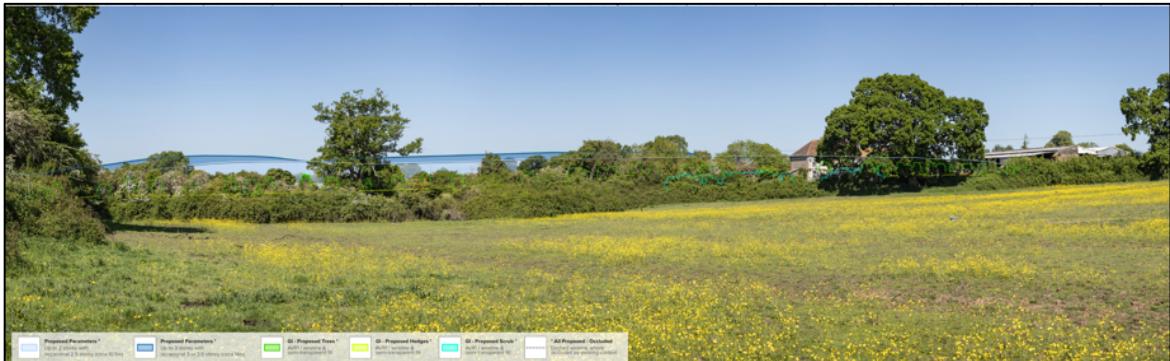


Figure 3 - View point 7 - View north-west from PRoW PSN/36

1.53. Views to the east from Warmly Hill will see a significant and harmful change. The development will be visible in these views and change the landscape setting of the area, with the buildings of the new development dominating this view. Whilst the LVIA advises that this view will be broken up by intervening landscaping and careful placement of buildings, this is not considered to mitigate the harm to a sufficient degree.



Figure 4 - View 13 - View east from the A420 at Warmley Hill

- 1.54. In order to mitigate harm, the LVIA relies heavily on retained and vegetation, and well as careful arrangement of building heights. However, the development is for 950 dwellings, and the submission explains that in places the density will be around 50 dwellings per hectare. Therefore, there will be little opportunity to break up the built form through green infrastructure, and with the inclusions of 3 or 3 1/2s storey properties dispersed throughout the site, there will be a marked, and harmful change to landscape character.
- 1.55. National and local policy expects development to add to the overall quality of the area, be visually attractive and sympathetic to local character and landscape. It requires recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and it affords great weight to the conservation of designated heritage assets, including Conservation Areas and their settings. Any harm to significance of these designated assets must be clearly and convincingly justified, and even 'less than substantial' harm must be weighed against public benefits with great weight still accorded to conservation.
- 1.56. Overall, the proposal conflicts with the NPPF (Dec 2024) and with CS1, CS9, PSP1, PSP2 and PSP17 of the South Gloucestershire

Impact upon surrounding woodland and common land.

- 1.57. The site is adjacent to or closely associated with Warmley Forest Park, Siston Common, Webbs Heath Common and Overscourt Wood. These comprise highly valued landscapes and designations that provide countryside character, recreational opportunity and ecological function. The introduction of a development of this scale, with associated traffic, lighting, noise and built form, would irrevocably alter the tranquil character of the area.

- 1.58. Paragraph 174 of the NPPF requires decision-makers to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, yet the proposals, which indicatively include taller buildings to create visual prominence overlooking Siston Brook, would be wholly at odds with the sensitive semi-rural setting.
- 1.59. Warmley Forest Park is a much-loved local park comprising woodland, grassland, Siston Brook and a pond, and is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). It provides both recreational space and important wildlife habitat. The application proposes significant interventions including new access bridges over Siston Brook and the creation of a pedestrian and cycle path linking to the Bristol–Bath Cycle Path. These works would intensify recreational pressure and formalise access, undermining the delicate balance between low-intensity recreation and ecological value, and diminishing the park's tranquillity.
- 1.60. To the east, Webbs Heath Common SNCI is designated for its neutral and acid grassland habitats. Although this land is excluded from the red line of the application site, it is closely associated with the proposed development. The applicant relies on the assurance that long-term management of this SNCI will continue, yet no measures are proposed to manage or enhance it despite the scale of development directly adjoining it. Similarly, Siston Common South SNCI and Warmley Forest Park SNCI, designated for their grassland and scrub habitats, lie close to the western boundary and are highly vulnerable to disturbance and habitat degradation from urban encroachment.
- 1.61. The proposed access at Webbs Heath would require works on registered Common Land, necessitating an application for de-registration under Section 16 of the 2006 Act. That process is entirely separate from planning permission and would be determined independently against statutory criteria such as the adequacy of replacement land and whether the public interest is prejudiced. It cannot be assumed that such de-registration would succeed.
- 1.62. To the north, Overscourt Wood provides public access land containing ancient woodland and priority habitats including orchard and deciduous woodland. Footpaths link the site directly to this sensitive environment. The influx of residents from 950 new homes would place enormous pressure on this habitat, leading to disturbance and deterioration.

- 1.63. The site also lies within a focus area for nature recovery, the East of Bristol Commons Connection, as identified in the West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Policy priorities in this location include the creation and good management of lowland meadow, dry acid and calcareous grassland. The applicant however confirms that they cannot achieve 10% BNG on site and this will need to be delivered offsite, failing to meet the objectives for nature recovery.
- 1.64. Taken together, the proposals would cause substantial and demonstrable harm to the character, tranquillity and ecological value of Warmley Forest Park, Siston Common, Webbs Heath Common SNCI, Overscourt Wood and the wider ecological network. The proposals are in conflict with paragraphs 174 and 180 of the NPPF, rely on an uncertain and separate statutory process for Common Land de-registration, and fail to engage meaningfully with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Planning Balance/Conclusions

- 1.65. The proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt. By definition, such development is harmful and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. No such circumstances have been demonstrated in this instance. No weight can be given to the draft allocation policy, as the Regulation 19 Plan has yet to be submitted for Examination. This policy is subject to a number of unresolved applications, and no exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to remove this land from the Green Belt.
- 1.66. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF is explicit that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Green Belt policy is one such protective policy. It is clear that the impact upon the Green Belt would form a strong reason for refusal, particularly given the fact that any harm to the Green Belt must be given substantial weight.
- 1.67. Accordingly, although the Council cannot demonstrate a 5-year land supply, the “tilted balance” is not engaged and the application should be refused. Even if the tilted balance were engaged, it is argued, the adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly

and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. Whilst the benefits of providing 950 homes is recognised, this, alongside associated benefits would not outweigh the harm identified. As well as the harm to the Green Belt, harm has been identified to landscape character, designated heritage assets, and the character and ecological value of the adjacent common land. Further, the development is not considered to be supported by the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the increase traffic and population, to the detriment of existing and future residents.

- 1.68. In this case there are no material considerations which indicate that a decision other than in accordance with the development plan should be taken, and the development should be refused.

Kind regards

Tessa Hampden – BSc MA RTPI

Context Planning LTD