

Objection to planning application PL/2023/04816 – land north of Park Lane, Corsham

The Green Gap

If you look very closely at the following photograph, taken on 6th August 2023, you may see two boys (centre left), one of whom asked me “Is this maize?”. I told them no, it is elephant grass, which started them discussing its height and whether elephants could hide in there. I was quite impressed that they took such an interest in the local environment and the ‘natural’ world.



The elephant grass or Miscanthus field is, of course, the 21-acre field which amounts to the only remaining green field south of the Bradford Road (or north of Park Lane as specified in the application). At the time of the applications (14/04179/OUT, 15/10519/OUT, 16/09292/REM, 17/06091/VAR) for what has now become the Park Place development, the case officer, in the conclusion (part 10) of his report dated 20th July 2017 stated: “...**the application will protect the long term future of the remaining green gap between Rudloe and Corsham**”. The ‘green gap’ (which had included the field which became the Park Place development) was one of Corsham Town Council’s strategy policies which was to maintain such a gap to prevent a conurbation which would link Corsham to Neston through Rudloe, Hawthorn, Westwells and Moor Green. Corsham’s strategy document reflected an aspiration (the avoidance of village linking and creation of conurbations) found in the Wiltshire Core Strategy. The (27-acre in total) ‘remaining green gap’ is highlighted in the map below. The photograph below the map shows the gap in all its glory with, in the foreground the field that has become the 88-home Dickens Gate development, our subject field in the middleground and beyond that (with a substantial

part out-of-picture) the field that has become the Park Place development. If we are to have any trust in the planning system, this remaining green gap must be saved.



The proposal

One wonders what really lies behind the subject proposal as the agents (Pegasus Group) has employed a certain amount of misinformation and distortion in its Consultation Responses here: (<https://development.wiltshire.gov.uk/pr/s/planning-application/a0i3z00001AyzTrAAJ/pl202304816?tabset-8903c=2>)

Let's analyse two of the specious responses:

1. *The application acknowledges that the site is part of the rural green buffer between Rudloe and Corsham, as designated by the Corsham Neighbourhood Plan. However, the intention of this policy is not to prevent all development within the buffer, but to prevent the coalescence of Corsham and Rudloe. The illustrative layout achieves this by maintaining a meaningful gap to the east.*


A more reasonable perspective... The development of three-quarters (about twenty of twenty-seven acres) does not leave a 'meaningful gap'; this proposal effectively brings about the west Corsham conurbation which local people, councillors and planners have been opposing for years; the slant of one local wag was:




2. (In response to the occupation level of the existing Science Park (Phase I)) As of 27th April 2023, 73% are occupied with a further 16% awaiting lease engrossment and 4% have agreed Heads of Terms, which would take occupation above 90%.

A more reasonable (truthful!) perspective...

- a. As of today, 9th August 2023, units 5, 6, 6A and 6B are advertised for rent on the Whitmarsh Lockhart website (see below). These units alone constitute a substantial part of Corsham Science Park Phase I which comprised units 4, 5, 6A, 6B, 6C, 7, 7A, 8 and 8a and was completed three-and-a-half years ago.


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Corsham

Units 6, 6A & 6B Corsham S...

Industrial

2,449 to 7,384 sq ft - To Let

Rent: £23,500 per annum Per annu...



Corsham

Unit 5 Corsham Science Park

Industrial

6,620 sq ft - To Let

Rent: £62,950 per annum

b. Apart from those advertised above, unit 4 is unoccupied (see photo below taken on a weekday afternoon).



c. Unit 6C is occupied by Qualasept (Bath ASU) themselves and appears to be being used as some kind of logistical hub. Unit 7 (as well as unit 3 in the older part of the park) **was** occupied by Microgenetics Ltd (a subsidiary of Bath ASU/Qualasept) but is now empty, the company having been bought (and relocated) by another genetics company. Unit 7A also appears to be empty as there is no company signage outside and a Web search for the address returns nothing. Unit 8A is also unoccupied – see

the photo below taken on a weekday afternoon:



d. This leaves only one unit rented by an 'outside' company. Unit 8 (seen at left in the above photo) has been occupied by Nova Systems since January 2023. This company deals with airborne mission systems.

e. Whilst unit 5 is advertised by Whitmarsh Lockhart for light industrial use, a planning application was submitted in 2022 for a change of use to allow up to 15 delivery vans to be kept there overnight.

e. The Science Park is so devoid of activity that whilst walking around I was asked what I was doing there by a Qualasept employee (logo on sweater) who appeared from unit 6C.

Apart from the empty units in the Science Park itself, the adjacent Fiveways Industrial Estate has a number of empty units including the substantial unit 11A shown below:



Some history

Planning application 13/05724/OUT for 'Land south of the Bradford Road' was the initial application for what were to become the Dickens Gate development and Corsham Science Park phase I. In view of the substantial number of objections to the loss of the green fields involved, the application was 'called in' by Councillor Dick Tonge. This meant that the proposal was brought before a Northern Area Planning Committee meeting held at the Wiltshire Council offices in Monkton Park, Chippenham (in March 2014); dozens of local people attended. Apart from councillors' inputs, three supporters and three opponents of the application were given three minutes (each) to give voice to their viewpoints. Among the arguments of the principals of the Bath ASU company was the ambition to create a pharmaceutical and bio-sciences hub at Corsham Science Park. We may see from the empty shells of buildings and the fact that the one company that fitted this profile, Microgenetics, has moved out that this ambition has come to nought.

Landscape character

The June 2004 North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment for Wiltshire Council by White Consultants, under **Key Views management strategy** (para 4.194) states: "The gently sloping topography of this area offers expansive views of both urban areas and the rural landscape. Views from key footpaths could be developed. Views from the A4 are important and clear separation between settlements needs to be maintained eg between Corsham and Rudloe." The designated view from the A4 may be seen below. And in the same document we find (para 4.197): "Around Corsham and associated settlements, the lower elevation and disrupted skyline is less sensitive to development although particular care is needed on the rising land around the A4 which is exposed to wider views. Any development within this area should be considered not within the countryside but on brownfield sites..."



Unfortunately, this “important view” from one of the highest points in north-west Wiltshire (Colerne is higher) has been compromised somewhat by the Park Place development:



However... an industrial estate with steel-clad buildings up to 13m in height would certainly defile this important view – a conceptual image follows :



Conclusion

The stated aspiration of a pharmaceutical and bio-sciences hub for Phase I has come to nought and as far as the 'market' is concerned there seems to be no requirement for further generic, class E, light industrial buildings in the wider Corsham area. A Web search for 'light

industrial' premises returned, amongst others, this Zoopla page:

<https://www.zoopla.co.uk/to-rent/commercial/property/corsham/#expired> where we find the Corsham Science Park units mentioned above, the substantial unit on the adjacent Fiveways Industrial Estate (also mentioned above) and a number of units at Methuen Park.

An analysis by the 'three locals' who spoke at the Northern Area Planning Committee against the planning application for the Corsham Science Park Phase I in 2014 asserted that the proposal was speculative and that there was no business or planning imperative to lose greenfield at Rudloe for a pharmaceuticals hub. Our assertion has proved to be correct. And there is certainly no imperative now for a further, speculative light industrial estate.

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10th August 2023