

Gifford's Park Proposed Developments

Comments from Holywell-cum-Needingworth Parish Council.

The areas known as Gifford's Park and Gifford's Farm, although in the consultation document under the St Ives spatial planning area, fall within the Parish boundary of Holywell-cum-Needingworth and as such the Parish Council object to the potential development being referred to as St Ives East. As far as the Parish Council can ascertain no approach/consideration has been made to carry out a boundary review and therefore any future development will be within the boundary of the Parish.

The area cannot be considered to lie within the village boundary of Needingworth and as the area sits to the East of a designated industrial area for St Ives does not sit within the residential area of the town.

The settlement of Needingworth has historically been classified by Huntingdonshire District Council as a small settlement as it is considered unsustainable. Currently there is a primary school, a village shop and 3 public houses. The Parish Council provides allotments and a cemetery and the Village Hall is run by the Village Hall Trust. A development of the size and scale proposed could not be served by the facilities currently available. Added to this the schools and medical practices in St Ives are already at capacity and no provision appears to have been made to rectify this imbalance.

The Parish Council further objects to the proposals in strong terms on the basis that the additional pressure of a scheme of this kind would clearly have, resulting in a devastating effect on traffic using Harrison Way, St Audrey's Lane, the A1123, the B1086 and where all of these roads converge. A development of the scale proposed would add at a conservative estimate 4000 additional vehicles to the road network plus commercial vehicles.

Previous concerns expressed by the Parish Council about the probable traffic effects of more recent schemes, such as the Manchester Arms, in this area have been proved to be accurate with the current resulting chaos and gridlocks at busy periods. The effect of the completion of the Morrison's site is yet to be evidenced.

The Huntingdonshire Strategic Transport Study should accept that any residential development would necessitate considerable funding including a revised transport strategy for this whole area, including additional access roads avoiding the current roundabouts and the possible provision of pedestrian and cycling bridges and/or tunnels. The Parish Council would appreciate further information about how any such study is to be undertaken as we feel that it is essential that rush hour periods and relevant related statistics should receive particular attention.

The current road network would also mean that the use of existing facilities within St Ives would be difficult to access. All of these issues need to be fully investigated before any work commences and a full infrastructure should be incorporated into any scheme at the earliest possible opportunity and certainly before work on residential properties commences.

In addition to all of this the proposals would appear to be in conflict with a core principle of the National Planning Policy Framework which is to encourage the effective use of brownfield land.

The National Planning Policy Framework expects local planning policy to take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. The land allocated for inclusion as Gifford's Park according to Natural England Agricultural Land Classification is Grade 2 which is considered the most flexible, productive and efficient in response to inputs and which can best deliver food and non-food crops to future generations. As local planning authorities are directed to seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to higher quality this should mean that Gifford's Park be considered much less attractive than for example, Wyton Airfield.

Our view, at this stage, is that this proposed site would create more problems with funding and accessibility difficulties as a residential site than it would as a possible industrial/business park. However, we would suggest that this alternative option would probably also be unsuitable at this time given the many other options currently available for inclusion in the Housing and Employment Land availability assessment which offer much better access.

Whilst the period for the additional consultation is short (26/9/16-7/11/16) the Parish Council received strong representation from the community at our Consultation meeting held on 18/10/16 and so far many written submissions have been received from residents along with verbal expressions of concern. These residents have been asked to submit their concerns directly to HDC via the correct channels.