

Save Honey Hill Group

Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State.
Water Infrastructure Planning & Delivery Unit
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

By e-mail only

23 August 2024

Dear Sir,

Application by Anglian Water Services Limited for an Order granting Development Consent for the Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant Relocation Project (DCO/CWWTPR24)

This is a response from the Save Honey Hill Group (IP 20041423) to your letter dated 13 August 2024 inviting representations from Interested Parties to a Post Examination submission made by the Applicant on 19 July 2024. That submission contained an updated Cumulative Impact Assessment, taking account of planning permissions and related consents sought or granted since the close of the Examination.

I am also seeking a response to a Post Examination submission made by Save Honey Hill Group (SHH) on 14 July 2024, which was sent via PINS alongside the ExA Report and Recommendation to the Secretary of State.

Response to Cumulative Impact Assessment Review

SHH has reviewed the Cumulative Impact Assessment Review undertaken by the Applicant. There are two elements of the findings of that updated Impact Assessment which are incorrect. We ask the Secretary of State to take these into account before reaching a decision:

Table 1-1 24/02432/SCOP – Hartree Site

This states that ‘No construction cumulative assessment completed because both CWWTPR and Hartree assume there is no construction overlap...’ The Applicant in REP6-002, Funding, submitted just before the close of the Examination, is now intending to dispose of a substantial developable site from within the existing CWWTP site for ‘advance commercial development’ likely to be research and development/life sciences floorspace in order to fund part of the CWWTP Relocation, alongside further funding from Homes England. SHH made representations on this and related planning matters in Section 3 of SHH67 (REP7-130) and in SHH71 (AS-207).

This development will need at least 3 to 5 ha of land for up to 90,000sq m of office/laboratory floorspace. This has to be within the boundary of the Hartree site (since the whole of the Applicant’s land is within that site) and the disposal is being progressed with the agreement

of the development partners, including Cambridge City Council. There will therefore certainly be a construction overlap involving CWWTPR and the 'early commercial Hartree development' and potentially completion and operation of the early commercial development before the decommissioning of the existing CWWTP takes place. These construction cumulative impacts have not been assessed by the Applicant.

Table 1-2 22/02771/OUT – Brookgate Site

This scheme was granted permission on appeal on 30 April 2024 and SHH made further representations on this in the letter to the Secretary of State on 14 July 2024 referred to below.

The Applicant concludes in Table 1-2 that there will be 'No impact on conclusions of CWWTPR cumulative effects assessment. Scheme was already classed as Tier 1, assumed that construction would overlap with CWWTPR...' That conclusion refers back to Site ID-9 identified in Table 2-6 of REP6-043 as Cambridge North Residential Quarter. The commercial elements of the permission granted are far closer to those described as ID-22 Cambridge North Commercial Quarter. Both of those proposals lie within the broader boundaries of ID-18 North East Cambridge AAP. The cumulative impacts of all of these are then apparently assessed in Section 3 and 4 of REP6-043.

The timelines shown for overlapping temporal impacts in Figure 3-1 are clearly now incorrect and it is likely that the Brookgate permission will be under construction throughout much of the CWWTPR construction period and be completed before the CWWTPR has been completed. It will also overlap with the 'early commercial development' of part of the CWWTP site noted above.

The cumulative effects assessment in Section 4 of REP6-043 is clearly deficient. It draws only on the scoping report provided for the Cambridge North Residential/Commercial Quarter as summarised in Section 3.5 and fails to take account of the Environmental Statement submitted with the permission now granted. Nor does it take account of any evidence given at the public inquiry or the Inspector's conclusions. In our view, supported by statutory consultees, the visual impacts of that development and the extent to which it will have impacts on the historic environment of Fen Ditton, including both conservation areas and Ditton Meadows, has been substantially understated. These are cumulative taking account of both CWWTPR and the 'early Hartree commercial development'.

The Applicant has also not sought to assess the cumulative traffic impacts of these three specific developments, either during construction or operation. This is a substantial omission which we would contrast with the detailed construction traffic assessment provided in Section 4.2 of the REP6-043 for the CWWTPR and the Waterbeach Station Development.

The conclusions drawn in Table 1-2 by the Applicant in relation to Hartree and the Brookgate sites cannot be relied upon and in our view are incorrect.

Request for Response to Submission made by SHH to Secretary of State on 14 July 2024

This letter, copy attached, was submitted via PINS, but neither acknowledged nor replied to on behalf of the Secretary of State. Since that letter was sent, further policy announcements

have been made by Government, including publication on 2 August 2024 of Proposed Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, including a New Standard Method for assessing local housing needs.

In that letter, we raised nine matters which we ask the Secretary of State to give full consideration before reaching a decision and, on some, to seek further representations from the Interested Parties to the DCO.

In particular, we seek responses to our representations in that letter regarding:

- (i) the Greenhouse Gas and Carbon Emissions assessment, which is no longer in accordance with case law, following the Supreme Court decision, UKSC 2024-020, the Weald Action Group case;
- (ii) the planning implications for the DCO of the Brookgate Land appeal decision;
- (iii) the potential waste of scarce public funding on the relocation. All that is set out in the letter remains correct and, since then, the Government has taken action to delay and cancel other major infrastructure projects, on funding grounds, some of which are certainly more essential than the relocation of a fully functioning waste-water treatment plant; and
- (iv) whether there is a need to redevelop the existing WWTP site to facilitate the 'growth of Cambridge'.

While we are aware that the substantial Proposed Reforms to the NPPF and other changes to the planning system are subject to separate consultation, they are of sufficient importance that the Secretary of State should be taking them into account before making a decision on this DCO application.

If anything, the changes to Green Belt policy in the NPPF favour the continued protection of almost all of the Cambridge Green Belt from development and, in particular the rejection of this application, which will destroy one of the most valuable parts of that Green Belt, as set out by SHH in evidence to the Examination.

We would also argue, amplifying the points made in the earlier letter, that there is no need for the redevelopment of the existing WWTP site to facilitate the continued successful delivery of housing to support the Cambridge economy. The New Standard Method for housing need assessment, which is to be mandatory, will require the local planning authorities through the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, to review their previous housing need assessments, in the GCLP First Proposals and the more recent Development Strategy Update (DSU), January 2023. Both adopted a method for housing need assessment, based on employment-led forecasts, that is no longer endorsed by national planning guidance.

While we believe that the New Standard Method is in many respects flawed, it is to be applied to Greater Cambridge. It sets assessed housing need at 2,224 dwellings per annum, which includes net additions to housing stock which are not new build. This annual rate is below the assessed housing need in the GCLP First Proposals and well below that suggested in the DSU in January 2023. There are ample sites with planning permission or allocated in adopted local plans to sustain a new housebuilding rate above that set by the New Standard Method,

without any need to relocate the CWWTP or redevelop its site. Housebuilding rates in Greater Cambridge remain buoyant, despite recent high interest rates and the disruption caused by Covid.

Conclusion

The Secretary of State is asked to consider fully both of these sets of representations. The Development Consent Order application should be refused for these, and other reasons as already presented by SHH at Examination and in written submissions.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Margaret Starkie.

Margaret Starkie,
Chair, Save Honey Hill Group.

Save Honey Hill Group



Steve Reed OBE PC MP

Secretary of State

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,

2 Marsham Street,

London SW1P 5DW

By e-mail only

14 July 2024

Dear Mr. Reed,

Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant Relocation: Application for Development Consent Order (WW010003): Report and Recommendation of Examining Authority (ExA) to the Secretary of State

This letter is sent on behalf of Save Honey Hill Group (SHH), a community group formed in 2020 to challenge the proposed relocation of the Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant (CWWTP) to Honey Hill, in the Cambridge Green Belt between Fen Ditton, Horningsea, Teversham and Stow-cum-Quy. SHH engaged fully in the pre-submission consultations undertaken by Anglian Water Services Limited, the Applicant, and in all aspects of the DCO Examination, which closed on 17 April 2024.

SHH has made a strong case for the refusal of this application in over 70 written legal, policy and technical submissions during the Examination and was professionally represented at the Examination hearings. SHH's objections are supported by the three most affected Parish Councils, national and Cambridge community and environmental organisations, numerous local residents and businesses.

A summary of SHH's comprehensive case for the rejection of this application was set out in a Closing Submission to the Examination and other documents, submitted at the close of the Examination. These are documents AS-207 and REP7-130 in the Examination Library.

The Examining Authority's Report and Recommendation was submitted on 12 July 2024. In accordance with the statutory guidance governing the Examination of DCO applications, the Report can only take account of the policy priorities and actions of the last Government and other information and events that occurred prior to the close of the Examination. The report is now with you, as the Secretary of State in the Labour Government elected on 4 July 2024, to decide whether the Order should be granted or refused. That Report and Recommendation is not publicly available to SHH or to any other parties to the DCO Examination.

SHH and other objectors presented a strongly argued case that the DCO application should be refused and, of course, hope that the ExA has agreed with that position and presented a well-founded recommendation for refusal.

However, any decision is for you as Secretary of State and must take account of the significantly changed planning and environmental priorities for Government that you, the Prime Minister and cabinet colleagues will be adopting.

There have also been other matters that have occurred since the Examination which you have a statutory duty to consider prior to any decision.

Changes in Circumstances and Events which the Secretary of State must Consider before Decision

Approval of the DCO would be contrary to the policy directions that are set out in the Labour Manifesto and discussed during the election campaign. The Prime Minister has promised clear and decisive action to deliver on those promises across the country and we await the content of the King's Speech on 17 July with interest.

We would ask you, as the relevant Secretary of State, to consider carefully the change of circumstances, priorities and information available since the Examination closed and consult colleagues in other departments (in particular, Housing Communities and Local Government and Energy and Net Zero) on the relevant policy aspects of this case, before making any decision to grant consent.

SHH and other interested parties should also be asked to make further submissions on some of the matters below, before the decision is made, to limit the risk of a successful judicial review by objectors.

Extent of Informed Local Objections: The application is opposed by a broad, informed coalition of local objectors and also subject to unresolved concerns expressed by statutory consultees, including the Environment Agency. As an early decision of your Government, any approval will be widely publicised and be read as a statement of new Government policy, that cannot be entirely blamed on the last Government.

Greenhouse Gas and Carbon Emissions: The CWWTP relocation will result in large and unnecessary greenhouse gas (GHG) and carbon emissions, far greater than if the existing Cambridge WWTP were retained and consolidated on the existing site to deliver a low carbon

net zero solution. This entirely feasible alternative was all set out in SHH evidence to the Examination.

Since then, the Supreme Court decision, UKSC 2024-020, R (on the application of Finch on behalf of Weald Action Group v Surrey County Council), issued on 20 June 2024, makes it clear that, in making any decision on an 'EIA development', it will be unlawful not to assess and evaluate both the direct and, **crucially**, the indirect effects on climate change from the 'downstream use of fossil fuels' which are extracted or produced by that project. The indirect effects from burning the fossil fuel were not assessed, or considered by Surrey CC, the decision maker in the Finch case.

This Supreme Court ruling is relevant to the CWWTP Relocation because waste water treatment inevitably produces large amounts of greenhouse gases, mainly methane, which can only practicably be disposed of by consuming it as if it were a fossil fuel. The Applicant intends to do this either by installing gas engines, to produce heat and power on site, or by the Applicant's preferred option, biomethane export to the gas grid. The Applicant's Environmental Statement did, in its final revised form, assess what are described as 'net' and 'gross' carbon emissions from these operations. The so called 'gross' emissions assessed are **not**, however, the totality of the on and off-site carbon emissions from the burning of the gas produced, because the assessment incorrectly claims the benefit from 'avoided' emissions from the substitution of gas from the WWTP, replacing gas supplies that would have come from fossil fuel sources.

Properly reported, the gross emissions would be three times larger than those reported over the first twenty years of operation. This was not presented in the Environmental Statement nor discussed at Examination. This matter may not therefore have been fully considered by the ExA or given sufficient weight in reaching a Recommendation. This needs to be addressed before decision.

National Government Policy: The ExA Report can only have taken account of the previous Government's legislation, policies and aspirations, some of which will be at odds with those you will adopt through, for example, early revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

This application is not for 'essential infrastructure' since the existing waste-water plant is up to date, fully operational and has capacity to serve any future housing and employment growth expected in the catchment. The DCO application has only been made to allow the release of the entire existing site for housing, although significant amounts of life sciences business floorspace, that will limit that housing potential, are now being promoted by the appointed 'master development partner' with the support of Homes England. This widens the policy considerations that need to apply to any decision on this application.

The Government is undertaking urgent reviews of public spending, water industry regulation and funding, planning and housing development policy, net zero delivery, the distribution of economic growth across different parts of England, protection of the natural environment and the Green Belt. All of these issues are relevant to this decision.

The Future Growth of Cambridge: SHH fully accepts the need for the continued sustainable development of Cambridge, including the need for the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan (GCLP) to meet sensible aspirations for the growth of the Cambridge sub-region. We do have great concerns about the last Government's Vision or Case for Cambridge and any weight that the ExA may have given these pronouncements. Michael Gove promised 150,000 new homes and similar numbers of new jobs in life sciences and other research sectors all to be miraculously delivered in less than 20 years. To put this in perspective, there are only 60,000 occupied dwellings in the existing Cambridge urban built-up area¹. The last Government's vision is utterly impracticable and unsustainable and was founded in part on delusional forecasts of the likely rates of innovation, product development and investment funding in life/bio sciences and other research sectors in the UK.

Development in Cambridge needs to be focussed on supporting the genuinely 'world leading research' that flows from the University of Cambridge, the two leading teaching hospitals and the pure research establishments, while protecting and enhancing the historic City and its natural environment in a sustainable way.

The redevelopment of the whole of the existing WWTP site owned by the Applicant will provide no more than 3,700 new homes and many of these could be built on surplus land released were the existing WWTP consolidated onto about half of the existing site, which is entirely feasible.

The rate of housebuilding in Cambridge and, in particular South Cambridgeshire, over the last few years has been very high and is close to the fastest in the country². Present rates are around 2,500 houses per year. Sites with permission or committed in approved local plans, already allow for over 44,000 additional homes to be built in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan area to accommodate growth up to and beyond 2041.

Design and Layout of the WWTP: The scheme has not been designed to minimise the adverse effects on the distinctive local landscape character or the Green Belt. The Applicant has chosen to design an unusual circular footprint WWTP, unsympathetic to an essentially flat countryside with linear fields and hedges. The Applicant has quite deliberately chosen to apply for a DCO for a footprint and design that only has capacity to meet demand for waste water treatment for no more than 12 to 20 years after scheme opening, which is a ridiculously short design life for a major infrastructure project. The proposed design is not 'state of the art' in terms of treatment technology nor mitigation of odours or other impacts. It will have operational carbon performance which is no better than the existing WWTP.

Adverse Impact on the Cambridge Green Belt: SHH presented convincing evidence at Examination that the relocation will be exceptionally harmful to the purposes of the Green Belt as defined in national and local policy. The site chosen is not at the edge of the Cambridge built up area but deliberately sited in the middle of a large area of highly valuable open Green Belt between three villages and the edge of the Cambridge built up area and which also includes part of the very important River Cam green corridor.

¹ ONS BUA Census Data, 2021

² See DLUHC Net Additional Dwellings data. Delivery rate in South Cambridgeshire was 13th fastest of all English local authority areas in 2022/23, at around 21.2 dwellings/1000 existing dwellings. Cambridge City, which is almost entirely built-up already, was 54th and still delivered 14.7 dwellings/1000 existing.

Green Belt studies for the local plans over many years have repeatedly stated that any development on this particular part of the Green Belt, even low rise housing, would cause ‘very high harm’ to the purposes of the Cambridge Green Belt and should not be contemplated. The Cambridge Green Belt intended to protect the unique historic City is far smaller than other Green Belts in England and designates only a very narrow ring of land around the City.

The release of the application site from the Green Belt for this relocation does not feature in any approved local plan nor is it proposed in the emerging GCLP. It has not been consulted on as part of any local plan. The emerging local plans are still at an early stage of preparation and the relocation has been deliberately excluded from them, so have not been subject to proper public scrutiny as part of the holistic sustainable ‘development plan’³.

The Green Belt on and around the site is definitely not previously developed or despoiled ‘grey belt’ which could or should be sensibly developed.

The development is a highly intrusive industrial complex widely visible in all directions. It would irreversibly occupy a 35ha site and require extensive landscape screen tree planting over the surrounding 55ha of land within the application site. The landscape is very open which means the WWTP will be widely visible across the whole of this Green Belt area between the villages and the edge of the historic city of Cambridge.

In essence, the application will cause ‘very high harm’ to 400 ha of valuable Green Belt, to allow about 35ha of the existing WRC site to be released for only 3,700 extra homes for Cambridge.

Loss of High Quality Agricultural Land: The proposed relocation would result in the permanent loss of 90ha of high quality ‘best and most versatile’ agricultural land (Grades 2 and 3a) and temporary loss of a much larger area during construction. It currently produces high yields of various arable crops. Once lost, the production from this land will have to be replaced by food imported into the UK, further reducing Britain’s self-sufficiency in food.

Need to Consider the Implications for the DCO of the Brookgate Land Appeal Decision (APP/W0530/23/33315611): This planning appeal was allowed by DLUHC on 24 April 2024 following a separate public inquiry into ‘non-determination’ which was paused in June 2023. It involves a key site within the emerging North East Cambridge Area Action Plan (NECAAP) area, immediately adjoining the existing WWTP. It now permits up to 54,000 sq metres of Class E employment development for life sciences and other uses together with 425 residential units. This is more than twice the employment floorspace and less than one third of the housing that was included for that land in draft NECAAP in 2021. This compromises the Action Plan’s high quality mixed use ‘urban quarter’ strategic vision.

The ExA was clearly not in a position where it could take this appeal into account in Examination. This appeal decision means that even less weight should now be given to that unapproved Action Plan or the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan in reaching a decision on the DCO. To avoid prejudice, you should seek the views of all of the DCO parties on the implications of this appeal approval before making the DCO decision.

³ i.e. the formal ‘development plan’ as meant in the 1990 and 2004 Planning Acts.

Scarce Public Funding Wasted on Relocation: The Applicant has always accepted that the existing Cambridge WWTP functions effectively and could be upgraded at modest expense to provide for future increases in demand and to secure high environmental standards.

Throughout the Examination, until a week before the end, the Applicant continued to claim that the relocation could be achieved within a stated budget of £250 million, £227 million of which is a fixed cash sum given in a DLUHC Housing Infrastructure Fund award made in 2019. This grant is administered under the direction of Homes England. SHH has continually challenged whether this total was sufficient given construction cost inflation and escalating design costs, both since 2019 and expected prior to completion.

SHH has also argued that the relocation is an appropriate use of Housing Infrastructure Funds, which was to facilitate the delivery of genuinely social and affordable housing.

It is in effect a direct subsidy for building no more than 1,500 affordable houses in a local market where the average open market price of a new build 2 bedroom flat is over £400,000, an incredibly high price which is around £5,000 per square metre⁴. Housing developers are entirely capable of funding a 40% affordable housing commitment and all necessary local infrastructure, on all larger sites in and around Cambridge, without the need for any subsidy or grant. These subsidies are merely adding to the profits of major housebuilders, whose profit margins are already excessive.

At the last minute before the end of the Examination, the Applicant submitted revised funding information, raising the total budget to £407million. Of that the HIF grant has inexplicably been raised to £277 million through Homes England and a further £92 million which will be diverted from selling part of the site for high value commercial office and laboratory development. The £407 million is a 70% increase on a budget which the Applicant had asserted repeatedly was sufficient for the planned relocation.

Housing Infrastructure Funding should be being directed to support housing provision outside London, Cambridge and the South East to parts of the country such as much of the North of England. House prices are low there and the sale or rental values achievable are insufficient to meet the costs of development and a reasonable developers' profit. On many brownfield sites in those areas, there are also high demolition, remediation and infrastructure costs, which prevent development without grant funding. This is constraining the delivery of essential social, affordable and market housing to meet your Government's commitment to 1.5 million new homes by the end of this parliament.

OFWAT is due to present the delayed draft price determinations for the main water and sewerage undertakings' expenditure for PR24 AMP8 for 2025 to 2030 on 11 July 2024. The Cambridge WWTP Relocation has always been mainly outside that regulated spending. These determinations, of necessity, will approve a major increase in capital spending in all regions to deal with the 'sewage disposal and river quality crisis' and other essential investment. Overall Anglian Water has asked for a total expenditure of £9.7 billion for the 5 year period to 2030, as

⁴ based on a 2024 survey of new build market prices in particular based on the Marleigh development, a well-planned large mixed use scheme under construction on part of Cambridge airport

against the final determination for PR19, up to 2024, of £5.3 billion, The draft determination for AMP8 will, if finally approved, cause real increases in consumer bills, even allowing for inflation. In the Anglian Water region, these are around 17%. £3 billion of the proposed AMP8 spending by Anglian Water is on waste-water capital expenditure. It is absurd that a further £400 millions of government money is likely to be spent mainly on a 'like for like' replacement of an existing WWTP that operates effectively.

Conclusion

The Secretary of State is asked to give careful consideration to the ExA Report and Recommendation and the relevant additional matters set out above. The Development Consent Order for the Relocation should be refused for these reasons and for other reasons already presented by SHH at Examination and in written submissions.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.

Margaret Starkie,
Chair, Save Honey Hill Group