

Statement by Cllr Natalie Reed

Thank you Sir, for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Natalie Reed, and I am the Chair of Croxley Green Parish Council, but today I am speaking as a resident.

At first, I wasn't intending to speak at this appeal. I am very fortunate to have a team of extremely skilled and experienced councillors who know far more about planning matters than I do, and have raised the planning issues associated with this development more knowledgeably than I could have.

However, as councillors in Croxley, we pledge to do all we can to enhance the well-being of the residents and keep Croxley Green the special place it is. As a councillor, I feel that weight of responsibility on a daily basis, and particularly since being elected as chair.

I therefore feel compelled to play what small part I can, and speak out against this development that so many residents of Croxley Green vehemently do not want, as shown by the petition (which gained 2 ½ thousand signatures in just one week), and the more than 600 comments on the original planning application.

As Mr Bishop from the joint resident's association mentioned last week, despite what some think, local Parish Councils and residents in this area are keen for house building to take place, we recognise the need, particularly for properties for young people and working families. But those properties need to be the right type and in the right place.

As Cllr Mitchell pointed out, the new Local Plan has finally reached Regulation 19 consultation stage. The Minister has directed that this site be included, to be considered along with many other sites within Three Rivers, both those identified by the District Council and those added by the Minister. May I respectfully suggest that a decision on this appeal could wait until the revised local plan has been examined and the inspector has considered all the sites proposed?

This application has often been compared with the Killingdown Farm development, now called Millside Grange, which the village was told was 'essential' in helping meet this housing need. In reality, the affordable homes initially promised when planning was granted at appeal, were gradually phased out in the interest of "making the numbers work" and other than a couple of blocks of small flats, what was delivered was an estate with prices far beyond the reach of the typical young person or working family. At the lower end of the scale, a small 2-bedroom terrace with a postage stamp garden was listed at £670k with multiple properties built priced between £1.4 and £1.7million. What guarantees do we have this will not happen again here?

I also want to add to the points that have been raised previously regarding access to the development and traffic issues, as there are some additional nuances that you may not be familiar with but which I believe you should be aware of.

Firstly, many people have mentioned the additional traffic associated with the planned new Breakspeare School. As this is a specialist SEND school, virtually all of the 210 pupils will need to arrive by some form of vehicle, be that parents driving, taxis, or the planned fleet of 20 mini busses. What has not been flagged as far as I have heard, is that there were multiple objections to this school being built, not because we don't want it in Croxley, we welcome such a much-needed facility with open arms, but because the site has completely insufficient access.

All vehicles will travel via Manor Way to access the school via a narrow residential street, which is currently a cul-de-sac (Figures 1). This road is not wide enough for 2 mini busses to pass each other so a complex traffic management plan is to be implemented, which will mean all mini busses must be on school grounds before any are allowed to leave, at which point all 20 will exit at the same time. These special measures do not even account for the fact that no other van or delivery vehicle in the street will be able to pass a single minibus, let alone a convoy of them, so this will inevitably result in traffic queueing down Manor Way and onto Baldwins Lane (Figure 2).

In addition to the pupils attending, the nature of the school means there will be a significantly higher number of staff present than a typical school, 169 parking spaces have been allocated in the site plans, so we can envisage that between pupils and staff, there will be at least 300 vehicles accessing the site at peak hours, all from Baldwins Lanes at the Manor Way roundabout, and down a very narrow residential street (Figure 3).

A further complication of the Breakspeare development is that there are sink holes in the chalk and initial investigations into the site deemed "significant additional groundworks necessary to address the chalk infrastructure of the ground". The outcome of this is that a huge amount of heavy ground works will be taking place and the associated vehicles accessing the site before the building works can even begin. This will massively increase the number of heavy vehicles required and the duration of the build, causing further misery to residents of Manor Way and all surrounding roads.

I would implore you, Sir, to review the objections to the school's planning application and consider the wider implications they have on the area. I would also ask whether any of this additional traffic has been included in the applicant's traffic analysis?

While on the subject of educational establishments, it has not been mentioned that in June, planning permission was granted for Croxley House, the large building at the top of the green just off Baldwins Lane, to be converted to a nursery with capacity for 150 children (Figure 4). It will be the only nursery in the area with the facilities to take babies from a young age and likely to be in great demand for parents both within and outside of Croxley Green.

Like Breakspeare, this development also comes with access challenges in that the driveway across the Green is not currently wide enough for two vehicles to pass and cannot be significantly extended due to being protected as a village green, and common land within the conservation area (Figure 5). There is also only space on the site for a

few cars to be parked for drop off, so the inevitable result of this will be that cars have to stop on the main road across the green and wait for clear passage, causing another major pinch point for traffic.

Finally, I have also not heard mention of the fact that 42 new flats are near completion on Grove Crescent, towards the top of Baldwins Lane (parallel to Manor Way), which will add yet more vehicles to this already congested area once they are inhabited (Figures 6& 7). Even Millside Grange is not yet at full occupancy so in the near future there will be yet more cars entering the road network in close proximity to each other.

Sir, I would urge you to visit Croxley during peak travel hours, ideally on a Thursday which is bin day, when the traffic grinds to a virtual halt in many streets. Residents of Links Way have told me that on a Thursday it can easily take them 10 minutes just to exit their drives, and a further half an hour to leave the village.

When you visit, look at the existing traffic flows and imagine the Breakspeare School traffic on top of that (both during building works and then when open), then add in the new residents of Grove Crescent and Millside Grange, then imagine flustered parents all trying to get to Croxley House and deliver 150 nursery age children on their way to work. Look at that and then tell me you genuinely believe there is the capacity on our village roads to add in several hundred more cars, at peak times, every single day, from this development.

I have spoken today as an individual, but I also speak for the numerous residents who are not able to be here themselves due to other commitments, and so have asked me to make sure their views are known.

In summary Sir, on behalf of us all, I would ask you to seriously review the points that I, my fellow councillors, and other speakers have raised, which demonstrate that this development is inappropriate and would be catastrophic for Croxley Green.

Please consider:

- The fact that this site is clearly green belt land as confirmed by the Arup report, and there are not special circumstances in play that should overrule this.
- That the proposed access roads are not suitable, and any measures put in place to make them viable such as removing on street parking, would cause unacceptable hardship for residents.
- That given the significant distance to the nearest station and that the roads to that station are both steep hills so extremely unlikely to be used by cyclists, the car use cannot be alleviated as claimed.
- That not only are the local roads already extremely congested and not able to accommodate many hundreds more cars each day, but these issues stretch for miles around, from Watford all the way to Rickmansworth, and Hunton Bridge.

- And finally, consider this development is planned to adjoin streets that already flood regularly in times of heavy rain, particularly Links Way and Rousebarn Lane, and even the water company is telling you they don't have the capacity to accommodate additional housing of this scale in the area.

Please consider all of these points, and then tell me and the other residents of Croxley Green that you genuinely believe this is an appropriate development for this site.

Thank you Sir, for the opportunity to bring these points to your attention.

Appendix:

Figure 1: Manor Way access road to the planned Breakspeare School



Figure 2: Manor Way meets Baldwins Lane



Figure 3: Manor Way leading towards school



Figure 4: Main roads where parents will need to queue to access nursery



Figure 5: Narrow driveway to Croxley House



Figure 6: Grove Crescent, road leading to Grove Court development



Figure 7: Point at which Baldwins Lane leads onto Grove Crescent

