

# Planning Appeal: Statement on behalf of residents of Sewards End

## Introduction

Thank you for giving our group the opportunity to be represented at this planning appeal.

We wish to voice our objections in the strongest possible terms to the proposed development of 233 residential dwellings on land south of (east of Griffin Place), Radwinter Road, Saffron Walden, Essex (ref: UTT/21/2509/OP). The original planning application received over 100 letters of representation from residents in both Sewards End and Saffron Walden, objecting to this proposal.

Saffron Walden is a beautiful medieval market town, full of charm and character, which retains much of its original, listed architecture. It is a popular tourist destination. Sewards End is a small, rural village, comprising around 210 houses (fewer than the number of dwellings in this proposal). It is situated approximately a mile and a half to the east of Saffron Walden on the B1053 and is separated from the town by open, agricultural land.

We support the objections submitted by Saffron Walden Town Council and Sewards End Parish Council. Our objections also concur with those who submitted representations previously to Uttlesford District Council covering the following issues;

- loss of rural environment, agricultural land and wildlife habitat (*See Appendix 1: photographs taken in May 2022 on Pounce Hill and looking across to the development site, which illustrate the loss of rural environment and wildlife habitat which would occur*)
- increased traffic and congestion on local roads and the knock-on detrimental effects to air quality and road safety
- numerous highway concerns, not least that the site's access is via a narrow 'B' road
- concerns about flooding and drainage
- the large scale of the development

## Local Development

In the last 10-15 years there have been several large-scale housing developments in and around Saffron Walden, with more currently under construction.

Housing Developments in Saffron Walden		
Development site	No of units/dwellings built or under construction (since 2011/12, except where stated)	Further units planned
Bell College site: Peaslands Road & South Road	175	
Ashdon Road	130	
Radwinter Road (former Willis & Gambier site)	125	
Friends School	74	
Ashdon Road Commercial Centre (Ridgeons)	160	55 (outline permission)
Land west of Debden Road (Tudor Works)	24	
Land at Lodge Farm, Radwinter Road (Jossaumes site)	31	
Moore's Garage, Thaxted Road	10	
Land behind cement works, Thaxted Road	28 (built 2007/8) 35 (under construction)	
Land south of Radwinter Road	151 49 (under construction)	
Land North of Shire Hill Farm		100 (outline permission)
Land at Little Walden Road	15	
Land off Little Walden Road	85 (due for completion Oct 23)	
Land west of Lime Avenue	31	
Land at Thaxted Road	14 (under construction)	
Land east of Thaxted Road	150 (under construction)	
Land South of Radwinter Road		72 (outline permission for C2 care/residential units)
<b>Total in each category</b>	<b>1287</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>Overall number of units/dwellings</b>	<b>1514</b>	
In addition, it has been reported in the press recently that Chase New Homes have submitted an application for a further 100 dwellings on the Friends School site.		
<i>Note: figures have been taken from a spreadsheet compiled by Uttlesford's Planning Department and provided by the Housing Enabling and Development Officer in an email dated 19/5/22.</i>		

In 1970 the population of Saffron Walden was approximately 7,000. At the 2001 census it stood at 14,313 and by 2011 it had risen to 15,504 (data taken from the Saffron Walden Parish Local Area Report on Nomisweb.co.uk, <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/Default.asp> ). Current estimates (as verified by Uttlesford District Council, drawn from *SAPE23DT8a: Mid-2020 Population Estimates for 2020 Wards and 2021 LAs in England and Wales* (release date November 2021)) are that it currently stands at 17,316. Confirmation of this figure is awaited when the results of the 2021 census are published in the summer. This represents an increase in the population of Saffron Walden of **21%** in 20 years and demonstrates that the town has borne more than its fair share of expansion in recent years.

Research on [www.citypopulation.de](http://www.citypopulation.de) reveals that towns at a comparable distance from London as Saffron Walden have seen a lower rate of expansion over the same period (again, using estimated figures for their current population):

<b>Town</b>	<b>% increase in population</b>
Royston, Herts	17.4%
Hitchin, Herts	16.2%
Bishop's Stortford, Herts	18%
Cambridge	17.2%
Guildford, Surrey	15.8%
Farnham, Surrey	15.8%
Maldon, Essex	9.7%
Colchester, Essex	26.4%
St Neots, Cambs	18.2%
Letchworth, Herts	14.2%
Baldock, Herts	6.9%

Only Colchester, a significantly larger town than Saffron Walden with far better transport links and infrastructure in general, has seen a greater percentage increase in its population.

It has now reached the stage where Saffron Walden cannot support any more residents. Larger scale development here must stop. The town centre dates back to medieval times and simply cannot support any further influx of traffic and congestion, nor can it expand to do so. All the roads leading into Saffron Walden are relatively small 'B' roads and are becoming increasingly busy and congested. It is not uncommon for it to take over twenty minutes to drive from Swards End to the Common in the centre of town, a distance of a little over a mile, or half an hour to Audley End train station on the other side of town. The road from Swards End (Pounce Hill) is cut into the hill and has very steep banks. As the road drops down towards the town it is narrow and winding, with no verges, and floods regularly following rainfall. Even after modest rainfall water continues to flow

down the hill for several days afterwards, and almost continuously during the winter months. There have been several serious accidents on the hill in recent years and the road is particularly treacherous in icy conditions.

We are not completely opposed to all development where that development provides some sort of progress and benefit for the majority of residents and the community at large. However, we cannot see any benefit, other than a financial one to the landowner and the developer, to this application. We are particularly concerned about the size of the proposed development and the disproportionate effect it will have on the town, which is already creaking under the strain. The majority of new residents moving into the proposed development are unlikely to be employed in the town and would have to commute much further afield to London, Bishops Stortford, Cambridge or elsewhere. This means that they would be forced to travel across the middle of the town to access the station, the M11 and the other main routes away from Saffron Walden.

### **Coalescence**

A major issue for residents of Swards End is the potential coalescence of the town and the village which would occur if this development is approved. It would destroy the integrity and identity of Swards End, as well as the town itself, and would provide no demonstrable advantage to anyone – including those who would purchase the new houses. Buyers would be purchasing properties in a town which is increasingly unable to support them. Saffron Walden is an important historic town, with a significant number of listed buildings. Swards End is a separate, thriving community in its own right and enjoys its status as a village and should be allowed to continue as such. Both the town and the village must be allowed to retain their separate identities, and not be joined together to form an urban sprawl. Following Uttlesford's refusal of the original application, a local Councillor was quoted in a media article as follows: 'There is a very clear argument that any development that is surrounded by open countryside on three sides could be described as a disjointed urban protrusion into the countryside. This one particularly where you are coalescing two settlements, this is extending out into the green space between Swards End and Saffron Walden' (published on Essex Live, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022, <https://www.essexlive.news/news/essex-news/outcome-bid-233-homes-would-6818952> )

### **Local resources**

Our town's resources are finite; dentists' and doctors' surgeries are already full to bursting and our schools are too. In addition, there has been no provision for additional leisure and entertainment facilities for young people in the local area beyond what has been in existence for some time. We all know that local councils are under extreme financial pressure and so it is difficult to see how Uttlesford District Council will be able to provide services, such as refuse collection and leisure facilities to an ever-increasing population.

*See Appendix 2: Screenshots taken from comments made on a local Saffron Walden Residents' Facebook group two weeks prior to submission of this statement. The comments illustrate the lack of resources in the town.*

## **Local Schools**

Saffron Walden County High School (SWCHS) is the largest secondary (11-18) school in Essex and is one of the top performing, non-selective state schools in the country. There are 300 places in each year group. Each year, every Year 7 place is oversubscribed by roughly 2 to 1.

SWCHS's priority admission area (PAA), or catchment area, covers not only the town, but also a huge rural area and constitutes the following parishes:

5. Pupils who live (see note 2) in the priority admission area for the school, which constitutes the following parishes: Ashdon, Great Chesterford, Great Sampford, Hadstock, Hempstead, Littlebury, Little Chesterford, Little Sampford, Radwinter, Saffron Walden (including Little Walden), Swards End, Strethall, Wendens Ambo. *(extract taken from the SWCHS 2023-24 Admissions Policy, available at [www.swchs.net](http://www.swchs.net) )*

Geographically, the PAA extends further to the east of the town than any other direction. Families living within the school's PAA generally have an expectation that their children will get a place at SWCHS, but this is becoming less and less likely for many of them as more houses are built in Saffron Walden. Families living in the eastern extremity of the PAA are most vulnerable to losing the chance to attend their 'catchment' school because of new developments in Saffron Walden.

The Planning Statement document provided by Bidwells states that there is 'some capacity in primary schools within Saffron Walden ..... and that the secondary school is over capacity' but provides no remedy for this. It estimates that this development would result in the need for an additional **37** secondary school places, **56** primary school places and **10** early years and childcare provision.

SWCHS is the only secondary school in Saffron Walden. It is full in every year group, and most have a waiting list. Linton Village College is also full, and Joyce Frankland Academy, Newport was oversubscribed in Year 7 in September 2021 and has very limited capacity in other year groups. The reality is that additional secondary age students moving into Saffron Walden **will** get a place at SWCHS because they will live at such close proximity to the school. In doing so, what will happen is that children in the more rural parts of the school's PAA won't get a place, something that, ordinarily, they would have expected. So, where exactly will they go? And how much further will they be forced to travel to get to a secondary school? Families who live further away from SWCHS will have their life choices significantly limited and parental choice, when it comes to schooling, will be virtually non-existent for them.

None of the four primary schools in Saffron Walden have any capacity currently and are forced to exceed their Published Admission Number (PAN) in some year groups to accommodate up to 33 pupils in a class. One of the Primary Headteachers in the town said to Kathleen Hutchinson (in May 2022) that the schools 'won't know what they will do if another 233 houses are approved and built'. She said that the town's primary schools are 'filled to capacity' with 'every inch of space' being used. Her classrooms are 45 square meters and they simply cannot squeeze in any more desks. So, once again, precisely where will the equivalent of two forms of primary school children go to school – will they be forced to travel miles away from the town? This would make no sense at all.

The impact on school places in Saffron Walden, at all Key Stages, is just one area in which your decision regarding this application will have a profound impact on the lives of existing residents not only in Saffron Walden, but also in the wider community which the town serves.

### **Petition**

The village group has organised a petition to further support our objections, which is currently underway, the results of which will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

### **Conclusion**

In our opinion it is wholly irresponsible to continue to add large and unwanted developments to a town which is already at breaking point from the point of view of its resources and amenities. Existing residents are, frankly, exasperated by developers 'dumping' swathes of houses in and around our town and then moving on somewhere else, with no regard for the impact they have caused.

There is absolutely no justification for it – we currently have several ongoing developments which are not yet built or where units remain unsold. It is time to call a halt now, protect and nurture what we have for the benefit of all and stop the unique characteristics of Saffron Walden and Sewards End being completely lost simply for the sake of profit.

Any further housing developments must be on a much, much smaller scale, more sensitively and considerately planned, and with far greater attention paid to their environmental impact and long-term sustainability.

**Please refuse this application.**

Thank you.

**Kathleen Hutchinson & Hazel Mack**

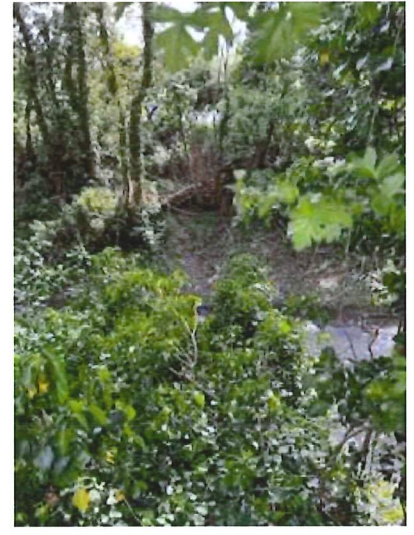
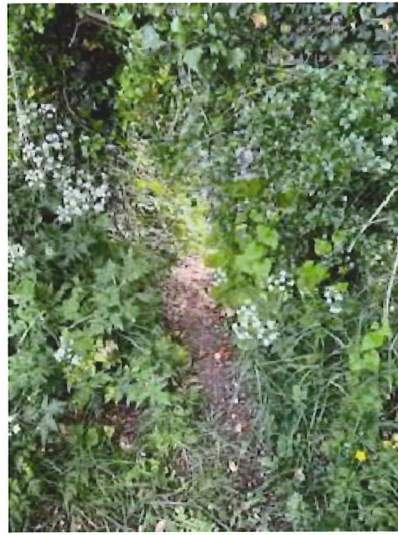
**22nd May 2022**



Appendix 1: Photographs taken of the proposed development site and Pounce Hill

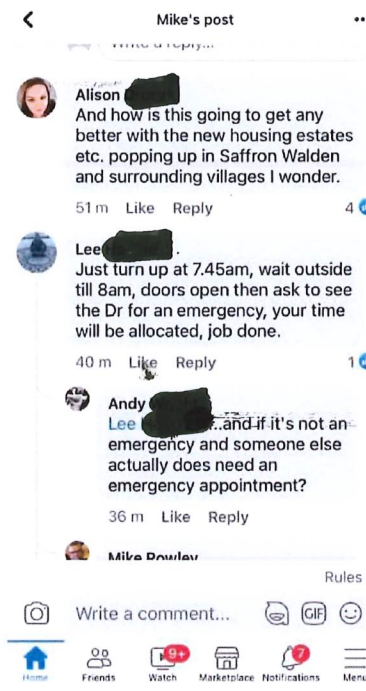
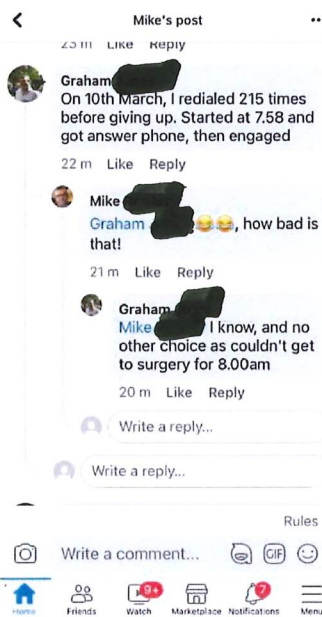


The view from the opposite side of Pounce Hill looking towards the development site.



The photographs above clearly show well-used animal tracks which criss-cross the open countryside either side of Pounce Hill – badgers, hares and large numbers of deer are active on the proposed development site and its environs.

Appendix 2: Screenshots taken from posts on the 'Saffron Walden Residents' Facebook group on 12<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022. The group has 8.5k members.





Saffron Walden Residents  
Claire [redacted] 21 h · 🌐

Lord butler leisure centre is obviously overcrowded with swimming clubs due to the expansion of the town, closure of RAB pool and Friends school. It's getting impossible to swim in the evenings, limited slots weekends.....when will the council except we need another public swimming pool ????

55 comments

👍 Like

💬 Comment

👤 25

All comments ▾

View previous comments...



County high had a open air one,also ,

20 h · Like · Reply

👤 1

Rules



Write a comment...



Claire's post



Lyn [redacted]  
I've been saying for years that this is the most expensive place I've lived, with the least services and facilities. We are basically Uttlesford's Cash Cow which they milk dead.

17 h · Like · Reply

👤 8



Sue [redacted]  
Lyn [redacted] huh! To think I moved here because houses were the cheapest and the town had such good facilities including a brilliant bus service. Sadly all has gone to the wall

11 h · Like · Reply

👤 1



Sue [redacted]  
Paying for the membership to swim is a real waste. Some of the swimming sessions are over subscribed and have a queue to take part. You have to book well in advance

Rules



Write a comment...

