



# Woodford Neighbourhood Forum

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To: Scott Royal  
Royal Pilgrim Communications

4<sup>th</sup> August 2024

## **Re: Woodford Garden Village extension proposals**

Thank you for inviting representatives of Woodford Neighbourhood Forum to the stakeholder preview event on 17 July 2024 at the Woodford War Memorial Community Centre. Several members of the management committee attended, viewed the display boards and spoke to members of the development team, as well as Woodford residents attending during the public viewing.

We have also reviewed the Request for an EIA Scoping Report for Woodford Garden Village Extension, prepared on behalf of Harrow Estates, dated July 2024 and posted on the Stockport Council planning website under reference number DC/092769.

We have the following initial comments on the proposals:

### **1. The site of the proposals has Green Belt status**

This important point was not apparent in the displays presented to the consultation. However, we are pleased to see that this has been noted in paragraph 2.42 in the Request for an EIA Scoping Report:

*“The Core Strategy covers the period from its adoption to 2026. Within the Development Plan, the site falls within the designated Green Belt.”*

We note that the draft new Stockport Plan, which is due to go for public consultation in September 2024, does not seek to change Green Belt boundaries and does not propose an allocation on the aerodrome site. In fact the aerodrome site was included in the options considered and ruled out, as reported in the Housing Topic Paper (paragraphs 1.2.17; 2.1.4; 2.4.11; 2.4.12; 2.5.11; and 3.3.7).

During consultation on GMSF and the Woodford Neighbourhood Plan it was clear that many residents treasure green spaces and are opposed to loss of Green Belt status anywhere within Woodford. We are pleased that Stockport Council has responded to the feedback from residents across the whole borough and prepared a draft Local Plan that does not allocate sites in Green Belt.

We do not believe that there are very special circumstances to justify these proposals for development in Green Belt.

## **2. The site is within the area covered by the Woodford Aerodrome Opportunity Site SPD**

An SPD for the aerodrome site was prepared by Stockport Council in 2013 and several of us were involved in consultations on the draft. We are pleased to see that it is referred to in paragraph 2.43 in the Request for an EIA Scoping Report:

*“In January 2013, the Council published the Woodford Aerodrome Opportunity Site SPD. This set out the environmental, social, design and economic objectives for the WOAS.” [typo]*

We are pleased to note that the guidelines set out in this SPD are being revisited in assessment of these new proposals.

## **3. The site of the proposal was due to be reinstated as agricultural fields**

In the masterplan that was an integral part of the application for Woodford Garden Village, which was granted planning permission in 2015, the proposed site was shown as a reinstated field network (reference number DC/053832 on the Stockport Council planning website).

This masterplan is shown in paragraph 3.32 of the Request for an EIA Scoping Report, which states:

*“The site is covered by the Woodford Garden Village planning permission from 2015. Figure 3 below shows the masterplan consented as part of that permission. The site of the proposed development is located at the southern end of this masterplan, in the areas identified as agricultural land and for commercial units adjacent to Oxford Aviation.”*

The restoration of the field and hedgerow network was an important part of the agreement in order to retain the openness of the Green Belt, improve the visual impact of the site and contribute towards environmental mitigation, including carbon capture, wild life corridors and biodiversity. If this area of the site is now developed, those important mitigating elements will be lost.

## **4. Cumulative over-development**

In 2013, Woodford village comprised just over 500 properties and there were 1,200 names on the electoral register. Planning permission was granted by Stockport Council in 2015 for 920 properties in Woodford Garden Village, which would triple the size of Woodford. An additional 550 dwellings in the extension proposals on top the current planning permission represents a massive expansion of Woodford.

Cheshire East Council has granted planning permission for 1500 dwellings plus commercial premises in Handforth Garden Village, which is immediately adjacent to the western border of Woodford. In addition, there are new developments nearby in Poynton and Wilmslow, which all put a strain on local roads and infrastructure.

We are pleased that paragraph 16.2.2 in the Request for an EIA Scoping Report acknowledges the need to consider the cumulative impact of development:

*“Woodford Garden Village: The consented Woodford Garden Village project will be considered alongside the proposed development.....”*

*“Garden Village at Handforth: The Garden Village at Handforth was granted planning permission in September 2023. Despite being located within the adjacent borough, the scale and proximity to the site means that there is the potential for cumulative effects that will be taken into account in the EIA.”*

## **5. Environmental Impact**

We are pleased to note that the Request for an EIA Scoping Report acknowledges the potential environmental impact:

*“The applicant has accepted that the development is of a size and scale such that there is the potential for significant environmental effects to arise. Therefore, an EIA will be undertaken voluntarily and an ES will be submitted with the planning application.”*

The Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT) noted the likely impact of the Woodford Garden Village development on two endangered species, Curlew and European Brown Hare.

*“Curlews, which bred on the aerodrome and possibly in the adjacent fields within the Woodford parish, are considered globally ‘near threatened’. A 20 year period (1988-2008) saw a drop of 55% of breeding curlew in the Cheshire region with the Woodford population becoming one of the few remaining lowland breeding populations in the Cheshire/South Manchester area. Recent development at the aerodrome is likely to be associated with the drop in curlew numbers in Woodford (affecting 1-4 territories).*

*Particularly notable in the Woodford area is the population of European Brown hares which was considered of ‘county importance’ in 2013 (19 peak count) and inhabited the extensive areas of grassland at the aerodrome and adjacent land. It is likely that recent development of land at the aerodrome has impacted the ability of this population to reproduce successfully as a marked decrease in numbers was reported in 2017.”*

The CWT report also noted the impact on Wildlife Corridors and the importance of grassland on the aerodrome site in maintaining habitat connectivity and makes suggestions for improvements:

*“Wildlife corridors are a key component of wider ecological networks as they provide connectivity between core areas of high wildlife value/distinctiveness enabling mammals, invertebrates, birds and amphibians to move between them to feed, disperse, migrate or reproduce. In conjunction with the results of the EConet analysis (2003), this study has identified a wildlife corridor network (shown in map 10) with ecological connectivity within and beyond the Woodford Neighbourhood Planning area.*

*The corridor closely follows the riparian habitat along the River Dean and two of its tributaries including a section of Red Brook. It also runs along a hedgerow bordering the golf course at New Hall Farm and links up species-rich grassland on the aerodrome with hedgerows, woodland and ponds in the Old Hall Lane area, finally ending in the woodland next to the aerodrome, just south of Chester Road. Along its length it incorporates two Local Wildlife Sites, namely Isles Wood and Hall Wood Handforth/River Dean Banks. In the far east it eventually links up with Wigwam Wood Local Wildlife Site and Poynton Brook which are both components of the Poynton wildlife corridor. Ecological connectivity in the eastern section is likely to change following development of the aerodrome site and the Poynton Relief Road and the corridor will need to be re-positioned. However*

*the corridor currently has good ecological connectivity along most of its length apart from where a stream is culverted under the runway on the aerodrome and where the corridor passes through an area of arable farmland in the south of the parish. Here connectivity is poor and could be improved by the establishment of rough grassland buffer strips on the river banks to reduce chemical runoff into the Dean and to help marginal vegetation re-establish.”*

The proposals will need to address these issues and provide mitigation measures.

## **6. Infrastructure requirements**

In paragraph 4.1.2, the Request for an EIA Scoping Report states:

*“It is anticipated that the application will seek outline permission for up to 550 residential dwellings including extra care units, a community hub comprising Class E and F1 uses, open space and associated works. The application will be submitted in outline with means of access applied for in detail.”*

The planning permission granted for the Woodford Garden Village allows the size of Woodford to be tripled. This 550 extension would quadruple it. As mentioned in point 4, we have concerns about the infrastructure needed to support the large expansion in the local population, including:

**Education:** Residents have reported that the Woodford School primary school is already full. We understand that the primary school was built with the potential to expand to two form entry. The proposal for an additional 550 homes would precipitate the need for expansion of the school. Reports from residents seem at odds with paragraph 15.3.9 in the Request for an EIA Scoping Report:

*“The closest primary school to the Site is Woodford Primary School, which lies just to the north and forms part of the existing Woodford Garden Village development. The school opened in September 2022, initially providing 30 Reception places; a new Reception class will be added each year until seven year-groups – i.e. one full Form of Entry (FE) of 210 places – are accommodated. Additionally, 20 nursery places are provided at Woodford Primary School. Department for Education (DfE) data indicates that a total of 53 children attend the school across nursery and primary classes as of February 2024, therefore leaving capacity to accommodate an additional 177 pupils.”*

This does not appear to address the need for extra places in each year group.

**Health care:** It is common knowledge that the local NHS is already over stretched with problems with buildings at Stepping Hill Hospital, staff shortages and long waiting lists. Places at NHS dentists are in very short supply. The proposal for an additional 550 homes and an extra care facility would put additional strain on all health care facilities. Extra care units will also require trained staff. There was no mention of access to health care facilities, such as a GP surgery, dentists or pharmacy at the consultation event.

However, we note that the Request for an EIA Scoping Report paragraph 15.3.13 states:

*“...analysis of NHS Digital data indicates that The Village Surgery and Bramhall Health Centre have combined capacity to accommodate an indicative additional c. 700 patients. Analysis indicates that greater available capacity is located within Hulme Hall and Cheadle Hulme Medical Groups, which have combined capacity for an indicative additional c. 10,000 patients”*

**Roads:** Traffic congestion has improved locally with the opening of the A555 and the Poynton Relief Road, but residents don't go far before they encounter congestion, particularly on A34 towards Manchester. The Handforth Garden Village development will exit on to the A34 and will significantly add to the volume of traffic. An additional 550 dwellings will add to the traffic burden.

### **7. Suitability of the land for building**

This was not addressed in the consultation event, but we note that geology, soils and contamination are covered in the Request for an EIA Scoping Report.

Woodford Neighbourhood Forum management committee has delved into the deep history and geology of Woodford. In case it is helpful, there is a summary in the Appendix at the end of this document. We noted with interest that the area was covered with glacial sediments as the glaciers of the last Ice Age retreated 11,500 years ago, forming the Cheshire Plain. The soils of Woodford consist mostly of clay, with pockets of sand, including running sand, and peat. We know from personal experience that drainage is poor and in many areas the ground becomes water-logged and prone to flooding in wet weather. It is also interesting to know that at the end of the last ice age, this area was largely underwater. The water eventually drained away, but it left behind a wetland landscape of meres, mosses, rivers and ponds. Remnants of some of the mosses (meres that gradually filled up with peat and then were covered by vegetation) are still here today, one of them is on the former aerodrome site. See map in the Appendix.

### **8. Accessibility**

The proposed development would be a significant distance from the main part of Woodford Garden Village, the Aviator pub, the proposed shops, the exits on to Chester Road, and the facilities in the rest of the village, such as Budgens Store, Woodford War Memorial Community Centre and Christ Church Woodford. We are concerned that these facilities could be beyond walking distance for elderly, or disabled residents and families with young children, creating a reliance on car travel.

### **9. Affordable Housing**

A figure of 50% affordable housing was mentioned at the consultation event and in some of the material on line. It is not clear whether the intention is to provide the affordable housing on-site or off-site. The site of the proposed extension would not be suitable for on-site affordable housing due to inaccessibility, as noted in point 9 above. There are very few employment and entertainment facilities and the site is very poorly served by public transport.

## **10. Community hub**

The detail of this proposal seemed flexible at the time of the consultation event. Some thought would be needed on how this would be managed and maintained and how it could offer an extra dimension as an additional facility over and above the facilities offered by Woodford War Memorial Community Centre. There have been suggestions of extending and improving the existing Centre to accommodate the needs of the old and new developments.

## **11. Timing**

At the consultation event we were told that it is anticipated that a planning application for these proposals will be submitted before the end of 2024. We are in a period of transition to revised local and national planning policies. A consultation on a new draft Stockport Local Plan is proposed for September/October 2024 and the target date for adoption is 2025. In addition, the Government is currently consulting on proposed revisions to the NPPF. Would it be better to wait until the new Stockport Local Plan is adopted and revised NPPF guidelines have been published so that the planning application can be determined against a set of current planning policies?

We are also concerned that, if a planning application is made for such a large development later this year, then it could pre-empt the location of housing in the Stockport Local Plan and possibly prejudice development of previously developed land in sustainable locations.

## **12. Positive features**

We acknowledge the positive features of the proposals including the 'rural' design, self-build opportunities, open spaces accessible to the public, 'natural' brook for drainage, community hub, potential to create new ecological 'green' corridors, and affordable housing (if achieved as a contribution off site). However we anticipate that the open spaces will be fairly small with 550 dwellings and a community hub in 39 hectares. The graphic provided with the consultation shows around 20 buildings plus a community hub in the proposed site, so creates an impression of space.

## **Appendix**

Information gleaned from research by Woodford Neighbourhood forum management committee.

## **Geology of Woodford**

### **Background**

Woodford is a settlement located on the southern boundary of the Metropolitan Borough Council of Stockport in Greater Manchester, bordering Cheshire. It is designated as Green Belt. The first impression gained by anyone passing through Woodford along the main road in a car does not reveal the true character of the place or its people. This brief overview aims to provide a deeper glimpse into the bigger picture.

### **Why is the ground wet? The Geology provides an explanation**

Woodford is 5 kilometres west of a geological fault at Poynton, where the millstone grit of the Pennines dropped by 200 metres around 300 million years ago, during the Carboniferous Period. As a result, the aspect is open and flat with height in the range 90 – 95 metres above sea level. The

land slopes gently down to the east, affording unobstructed views of the Pennines from many locations in Woodford, which are very much treasured by residents and visitors.

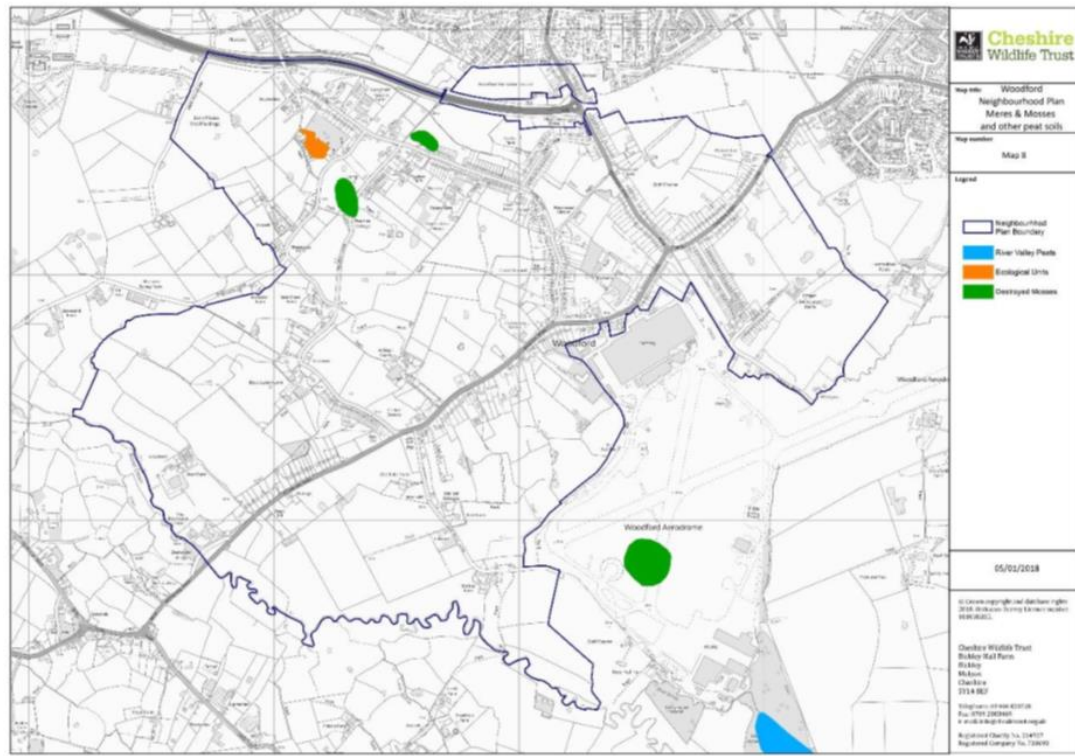
Woodford lies on an aquifer consisting of ground water held in porous sandstones laid down 200 million years ago in the Triassic period, sand and marl (a crumbly mixture of clay and limestone). The aquifer is part of a series of deep basins throughout the UK, including the Cheshire Basin, which are important sources of ground water. This is an area of high environmental sensitivity because the sandstone is formally designated as a Principal Aquifer and there is a Groundwater Source Protection Zone for a nearby public water supply abstraction. It is subject to Environment Agency groundwater protection position statements (available [here](#)). The pumping station at the end of Church Lane taps into this water. The base of the Triassic sandstone layer varies from above sea level in outcrops at the surface, such as Alderley Edge, to deeper than 2,500 m below sea level in the centre of the Cheshire Basin.

The area was covered with glacial sediments as the glaciers of the last Ice Age retreated 11,500 years ago, forming the Cheshire Plain. The soils of Woodford consist mostly of clay, with pockets of sand, including running sand, and peat. Drainage is poor and in many areas the ground becomes water-logged and prone to flooding in wet weather.

Environmental studies conducted on the former Woodford Aerodrome site confirmed that the site lies on the aquifer, consisting of permeable, solid sandstone and pebble beds with high capacity for water storage. Above this, layers of sand and gravel hold some ground water, while extensive layers of clay are impermeable with very low capacity for water storage.

The Cheshire Wildlife Trust notes that Woodford falls within the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain National Character Area, which is described as a pastoral area of rolling agricultural plain. At the end of the last ice age, this area was largely underwater. The water eventually drained away, but it left behind a wetland landscape of meres, mosses, rivers and ponds, which is of international importance for its wetland wildlife. Remnants of some of the mosses (meres that gradually filled up with peat and then were covered by vegetation) are still here today, located near Church Lane, Hall Moss Lane and on the former aerodrome site. See map below.

**Map showing location of remnants of mosses (shaded green) in Woodford**  
*Reproduced with permission from the Cheshire Wildlife Trust*



With regards,

*E. M. Frearson*

Evelyn Frearson, on behalf of the Woodford Neighbourhood Forum management committee