



## **Planning application RU.20/0098 (Rusham Park student village)**

21 February 2020.

Dear Sir or Madam,

Notwithstanding its Green Belt status, this site became developed many decades ago.

As much as the Egham Residents' Association would like it to revert to a green open space, we have realistically to accept that that is not going to happen.

The main question is not whether the site will be redeveloped, but what form and scale the redevelopment will take.

This said, ERA does have serious concerns about this particular scheme for the following reasons:

It would be good to have a clear understanding of how the overall development footprint and mass proposed in this scheme compare with those of peak use of the site under Procter and Gamble's ownership. So far, however – despite the great volume of documentation accompanying the application – we have been unable to do so.

The scheme also offers only a vague prospect of some relief from the spread of student-occupied HMOs in Egham that has caused so much irritation and distress to some families in the town, and which has caused a great character change (for the worse) in parts of it.

The student 'village' would include up to 2000 student bedrooms. At one of the presentations organised to publicise this scheme I was told that Royal Holloway College was also proposing an overall increase in student numbers of 800. That suggested much scope for a reduction in the number of student HMOs in the town. But I was subsequently told at a meeting at the college that it doesn't "recognise" the 800 figure, and no alternative figure was given.

In a letter accompanying the application the college has acknowledged that student HMOs have led to much controversy in Englefield Green. Regrettably, however, there is no such recognition of the anger that the same phenomenon has produced in Egham. For the avoidance of doubt, I wish to stress that the impact of student HMOs in Egham over the past decade has been very deleterious and self-reinforcing. The more they spread, the more families feel under siege and decide to leave Egham – creating opportunities

for more conversions into HMOs. It should shame Runnymede Borough Council that it has had no strategy for tackling this.

A particular cause for concern about RU.20/0098 is the car parking implications. None of the students resident in the 'village' will be allocated a permit to park in the car-park that will be retained on the site. But common sense screams at us that some of them will nonetheless wish to bring cars to the locality. If only 5pc of them sought to do so that would be 100 vehicles looking for somewhere to park.

We have a nightmare vision of a line of parked cars stretching along Whitehall Lane and even reaching into Manor Way. What is RHUL proposing to do to stop this becoming a reality?

We are also worried about the flooding implications of this proposed development. After a weekend in which quite a few parts of Egham have once again been affected by flooding, we are bemused that the college's answer to the question (on the planning application form) of whether the scheme would increase the risk of flooding elsewhere is a straight 'No'. Really? That answer cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged.

In this context this planning application should not be considered in isolation. A planning application for gravel-raising on adjacent land at Milton Park Farm has now been in existence for over a decade, and one of the dark shadows it casts over the adjoining area is an increased flooding risk. That area includes the proposed student village. What is the flooding risk of the two schemes put together (not to mention the possibility of gravel-raising on nearby Whitehall Farm)?

We also fear that the granting of a planning consent for this scheme would make the adjacent Green Belt site known as Mrs Caddey's Field look even more like a sitting duck for housing development.

We referred earlier to a nightmare vision. A bigger one is that if everything in the offing for the Whitehall Lane area comes to pass, the character of this part of Egham will be changed greatly and irrevocably. A semi-rural area would be turned into an extension of suburban sprawl as pressure mounted to widen Whitehall Lane for cars, student buses and lorries, and provide better footpaths.

Is Runnymede Council prepared to be complicit in that?

Yours faithfully,

Chris Fisher (Chairman)

Egham Residents' Association